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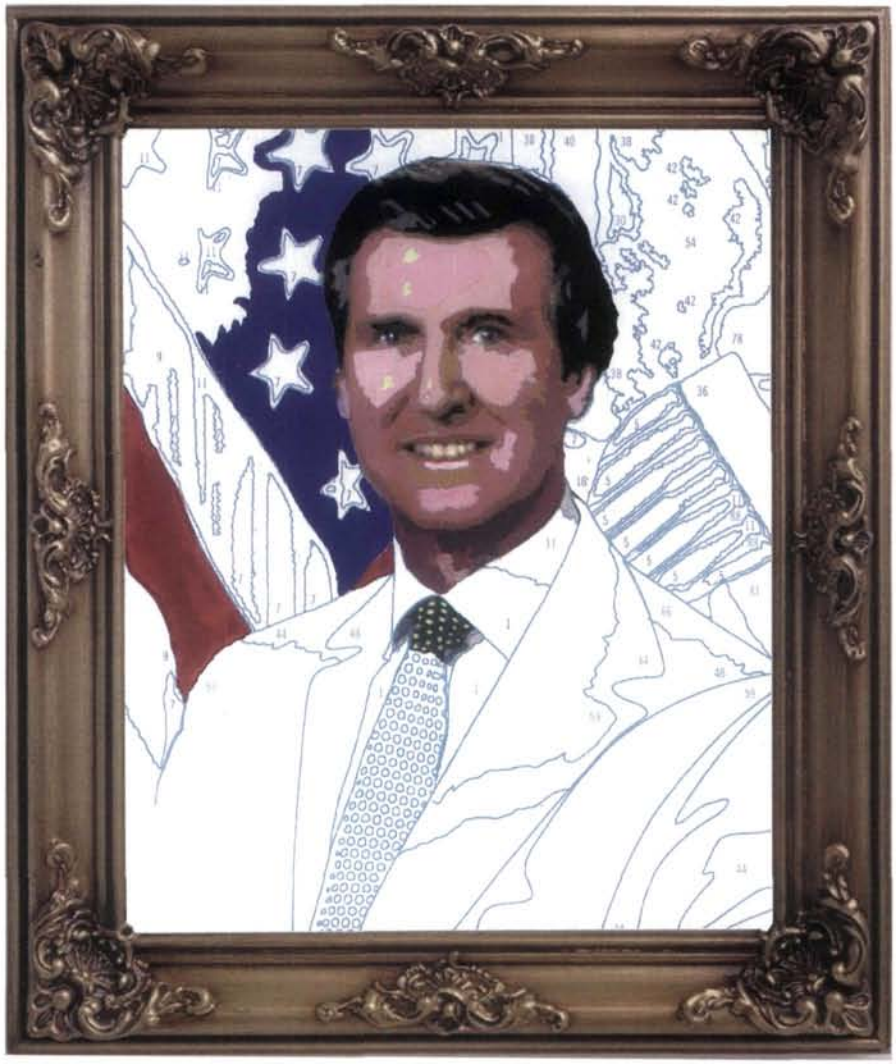

William Cohen Ponders the Minutiae of Policy, the Angst of Political Existence and the Moral Meaning of it All.

Is This Really What We Want in a Secretary of Defense?

CHARLES LANE

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FROM WASHINGTON

The China syndrome

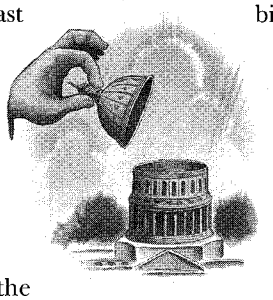
The wonderful thing about congressional hearings is the way they have of going off in hot pursuit of truths that are beside the point. (Did the nominee, or did the nominee not, make a remark concerning a pubic hair on a Coke can?) So far, the Senate hearings now underway into the fund-raising scandals of 1996 promise to maintain the tradition.

Senator Fred Thompson, the Republican chairman of the committee, set the agenda in his opening remarks, when he declared that the committee had evidence of "the existence of a Chinese plan to subvert our election process" and to "buy access and influence in furtherance of Chinese Government interests." Senator John Glenn, the ranking Democrat on the committee, who made it clear on the opening day that he regards his job to be partisan damage control, played the role of the sober judge, in which context he smearingly suggested that those who wished to explore Senator Thompson's allegations were flirting with McCarthyism. "We must be careful," he said. "During the 1950s, we can all recall what happened to this committee, and I doubt anyone here wants to return to those dark days." Senator Glenn went on to discuss what he felt were the really important allegations of wrongdoing at hand, all of which turned out to involve Republicans.

Senator Robert Torricelli, Democrat of New Jersey, who is widely, widely admired for the probity and restraint that he exhibited in a 1996 race that set records for money spent and mud slung, said that he, personally, was deeply worried that attempts to investigate illegal contributions by Asians and Asian Americans might cause the sort of mental anguish that Italian-Americans felt during the Kefauver organized crime hearings four decades ago. Torricelli declared: "The pain, Mr. Chairman, that many Americans felt that day must not and will not be allowed to be visited on Asian Americans in the coming weeks." (The trial of Vincent the "Chin" Gigante is painful enough for ethnically sensitive Americans.)

You bet, said Senator Daniel Akaka, Democrat of Hawaii. "We must ignore the temptations to assign guilt by association, especially ethnic association." Furthermore, said Senator Joseph Lieberman, Democrat of Connecticut, "we must be careful not to be overzealous, lest we risk allowing these hearings to degenerate into a partisan witch-hunt or a bipartisan headline hunt."

Thus, on the very first day of the hearings, the vital issue was raised. Is there a Yellow Peril, or is it vile prejudice to suggest so? Of course, as Senator Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois, pointed out in a moment of un-senatorial clarity, this is not the vital issue at all: "If China played no role in the last campaign, we would still have a serious national scandal in our campaign finance system. The problem is not just foreign money, it's good old American money. It's hard money, soft money and mystery money."



It is a serious matter if the government of the People's Republic of China sought to subvert the American electoral process and manipulate U.S. policy through illegal campaign contributions. But what is serious about this is not China's perfidy. Why wouldn't China try to corrupt us? By its lights, why shouldn't it? Although it may be news in the Oval Office, the men who run the People's Republic of China are not great believers in the democratic process, nor great admirers of the American political system. They believe in elections that are controlled, oppositions that are destroyed and government actions that are routinely bought and sold. That such a regime might seek to affect the actions of our government through bribery does not beggar belief, and it is not what really matters in the questions before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee.

What matters is whether American political parties, American politicians and, above all, the White House, invited the corruption. What matters is not whether the Chinese government sought to subvert the American electoral process. It's whether the American government sought to subvert the American electoral process. Did the White House direct a fund-raising operation intended, on a vast, knowing and systematic basis, to subvert the law? Was this operation, in its greed, so aggressively unconcerned with legality and even the appearance of ethical conduct that it signaled to the Chinese—and to others with dirty money and needful of favors—a willingness to do backdoor business?

The evil geniuses of Beijing didn't force Bill Clinton to make dunning calls to donors from the White House. They didn't force him to sell access to the White House and to the person of the president. They didn't force him to insist that John Huang be placed in the Commerce Department, or later in the Democratic National Committee. They didn't force him to lend a sympathetic ear to James Riady or Roger Tamraz or R. Warren Meddoff or any of the dubious characters who gave or sought to give money to the Democrats in the belief that this money was regarded by the White House as a lightly washed contribution to the president's re-election effort, to be rewarded with a chance to say a few private words to the president and the possibility of influencing the actions of the government of the United States. Li Peng didn't make Ron Brown give seats on foreign trade missions to big DNC contributors.

Nor did the Yellow Peril force the chairman of the Republican Party, Haley Barbour, to set up the National Policy Forum, an ostensibly independent "research group," which Democrats credibly charge with aggressively seeking illegal foreign donations that could then be laundered to the benefit of the Republican National Committee. The Chinese didn't oblige Barbour to obtain through the National Policy Forum more than $2 million in loan guarantees from a businessman in Hong Kong, even after the forum's president warned Barbour in writing that "it would be wrong to do so." Nor did they bully Simon Fireman, the vice chairman of Bob Dole's campaign finance committee, to hide illegal campaign contributions under the names of front donors.

What happened here in 1996 was a scandal all of our own making. In the relentless and remorseless efforts by both parties to glom as much money as possible, and to push the election laws to the breaking point, the disaster of 1996 was bound to occur. Sooner or later, there was bound to be a president who realized the advantage of taking that last step, of merging party fund-raising and re-election fund-raising, and integrating both into the White House itself. Sooner or later, some White House was bound to establish the kind of wide-open, see-no-evil operation that the Clinton White House did. And when that happened, the men who are always hovering around every White House, the men with ready money and special requests, were bound to realize that their time had come. We corrupted ourselves.

MICHAEL KELLY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

JULY 28, 1997

FOUNDED 1914
WASHINGTON, D.C.
ISSUE 4,306

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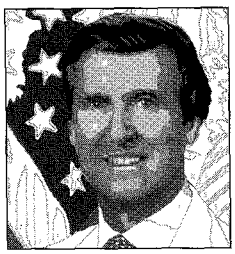

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 217, Number 4, Issue 4,306, July 28, 1997. (Printed in the U.S. on July 9, 1997.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 6 & 13, July 14 & 21, Aug. 11 & 18, and Sept. 8 & 15, 1997) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. The New Republic Advertising Sales Office (212) 702-4882. Yearly subscriptions, $69.97; foreign, $99.97; Canada, $84.97. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage & handling). © 1997 by The New Republic, Inc. (ISSN 0028-6583). Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, CD-ROM, issue and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Internet mail address: tnr@aol.com Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscribers: Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 37298, Boone, IA 50037-0298. For subscription problems call 1-800-827-1289.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Sleeping with the enemy

To the editors:

In your June 16 issue, there was an unfortunate omission in the set of wise prescriptions offered for U.S. policy toward Africa by the editors ("The End and the Beginning"): conditioning U.S. support for African armed forces on the consolidation of the rule of law and other democratic institutions. A primary finding of our just completed study of U.S. policy toward Africa's halting transition to democracy is that the cold war strategy of cozying up to corrupt and repressive forces continues. Indeed, an astonishing 94 percent of Africa's armies received U.S. military support from 1991 to 1995 in the form of arms, training or joint combat exercises. Of the 3,408 officers who received U.S. military training, 71 percent came from authoritarian regimes.

The trend-line is, if anything, going up: in 1995 there were twenty African countries taking part in combat exercises with U.S. forces, while the proposed number for 1998 is thirty-three. In addition, Pentagon trainers encourage African armed forces to get involved in economic development activities, which displaces civilian capabilities and leads to corruption. Arming and training military forces who pose a mortal threat to democracy in Africa is consistent with neither our values nor our strategic interests.

CALEB ROSSITER
Director,
Demilitarization for Democracy
Washington, D.C.

Classless

To the editors:

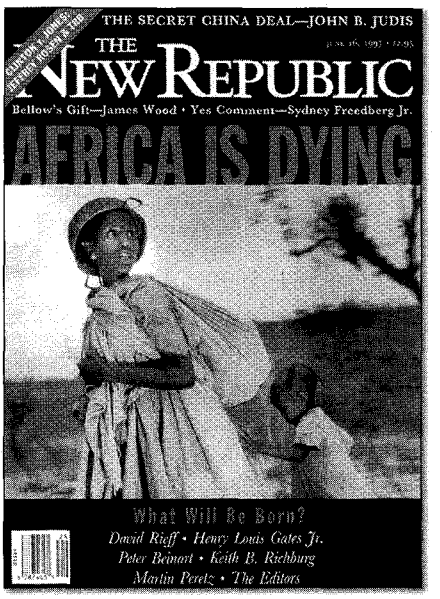
Michael Kelly ("Class," June 16) seems to lack a sense of historical perspective. Kelly claims that the case of William Jefferson Clinton demonstrates the typical behavior of the New Class of the 1960s when dealing with the supposed lower orders. But, if we examine history, we'll see that our political leaders, like the European nobility of old, have generally insisted on the *droit du seigneur.* John F. Kennedy's little black book was probably thicker than any volume in the Library of Congress, and Lyndon B. Johnson (according to Garry Wills) always claimed, "Why, I've had more gals accidentally than Jack Kennedy ever did on purpose." Kelly is certainly correct in highlighting Clinton's self-destructive PR style in the Paula Jones case. But, as far as sexual matters are concerned, Clinton could learn a few lessons from, say, the aristocratic Douglas MacArthur, who once imported a Eurasian beauty from Manila and set her up in style in a Washington love nest.

WILLIAM M. BURKE
San Francisco, California

Crime and punishment

To the editors:

Jean Bethke Elshtain ("Sacrilege," June 16) is in good company when she would have us believe that the sixth of the Ten Commandments states, "Thou shalt not kill." Unfortunately, she errs: the Hebrew "*Lo Tirtzach*" means "Thou shalt not murder." How could it be otherwise,


THE SECRET CHINA DEAL—JOHN B. JUDIS
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when the same Scripture repeatedly mandates judicial execution ("killing") in a variety of contexts?

Whatever one's personal position or rational arguments surrounding the ethics and legitimacy of the death penalty, it should be clear that the Ten Commandments do not prohibit the taking of life per se.

RABBI BASIL HERRING
Atlantic Beach, New York

To the editors:

Jean Bethke Elshtain asks rhetorically, "How on earth will executing Timothy McVeigh ... expiate for 168 deaths? Will the moral universe be thereby righted?" To which I would answer: yes, somewhat. More, at any rate, than if he were merely kept in jail. A *lot* more than if he were set free. Simply because we can't execute a murderer 168 times doesn't mean we shouldn't execute him once.

TED KLEIN
New York, New York

Moore or less

To the editors:

In a June 5 article in *The Wall Street Journal* ("ARE SUPPLY SIDERS ALL WASHED UP?"), I reported the simple fiscal fact of life that in the 1980s, after Ronald Reagan's tax cuts, federal revenues rose at a faster pace than in the 1990s, which saw two record income tax increases. A snide article by Jonathan Chait ("Less is Moore," June 30) attacks me as "devious," "sneaky" and an "intellectual apologist" who "torture[s] the data." And the screed concludes, "it might be generous to call Moore ignorant." Okay, okay. I confess I didn't go to an Ivy League school.

The passion and severity of such attacks are an unnerving reminder that there are still liberals who seem incapable of any sane discussion of the Reagan era. TNR has long suffered from this pathology. In the magazine's version of history, it was Paul Volcker—not Reagan—who ended the disease of 1970s runaway inflation; and the 1980s economic boom, the longest peacetime expansion in this century, was simply a normal business cycle recovery. According to this version of events, the dim-witted Reagan was only responsible for two things that happened in the 1980s: $200 billion budget deficits and the S&L crisis.

Fortunately, the left can't rewrite facts. I welcome readers to look up the data on pages 22 and 23 of the Historical Tables of the Budget of the United States Government. If the data have been tortured, I'm afraid the culprit is Clinton budget director Franklin Raines. On these pages you will discover that, from 1990 through the most recent estimates for 1997, total federal tax collections have risen from $1.03 trillion to $1.55 trillion. After inflation, this is a healthy 23 percent rise on federal receipts over seven years. That's something Clintonites can justifiably crow about.

Down the page a bit, you will see that, from 1982 to 1989, federal receipts grew from $618 billion to $991 billion. After inflation, this was an even healthier 24 percent increase in tax collections. When income tax rates fell by nearly two-thirds, total federal tax receipts grew slightly faster than when Bush and Clinton raised income tax rates by 50 percent. Unless there was a powerful supply-side response to the changes in tax rates, it's very hard to explain why that happened. So if high tax rates and low tax rates harvest roughly the same amount of revenues, why not keep rates low?

Now here is TNR's rebuttal. First is the

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complaint that I have measured the impact of the Reagan tax cuts starting in 1982, not in 1981 when Reagan became president. Chait calls this "sneaky." Really? Reagan did assume office in January 1981, but his Economic Recovery Tax Act wasn't fully implemented until January of 1983. So 1983 was the first year of the full tax rate cut.

The truth is that my choice to start with 1982 seems almost designed to be overly fair to the other side. In fact, my analysis of the Reagan tax cuts begins in the worst possible year for the supply-side case: the year before a Niagara Falls drop-off in federal revenues. If I had wanted to "torture the data," I would have begun the analysis in 1984—when federal coffers began to overflow with revenues.

Chait's explanation of why revenues soared so rapidly in the 1980s is a gem. Tax receipts climbed because Reagan agreed to a series of payroll tax increases. After all these years of damning Reagan for cutting taxes, the new liberal line is that he really raised them. The contorted logic runs something like this: revenues went up in the 1980s because Reagan was a tax increaser, but the deficit went up in the 1980s because Reagan was a tax cutter. Well, which is it?

The reality is that the payroll tax hikes in the 1980s were only about half as large as the income tax cuts. Virtually all taxpayers with incomes over $20,000 received a net reduction in their taxes in the 1980s, even accounting for payroll tax hikes. It is true that payroll tax receipts skyrocketed in the 1980s. These things happen when you employ 18 million more people. Payroll tax revenues rose substantially faster than the Social Security Administration actuaries and the Greenspan Commission envisioned in their wildest dreams. Senator Social Security, Pat Moynihan, still expresses bewilderment about where all the 1980s payroll tax revenues came from. The answer is simple. Even as the supply-side tax cuts were causing income tax revenues to rise at a slower rate than they might have otherwise, revenues from every other source—including payroll taxes—surged as the economy shifted into higher gear.

Given the vigorous pace of the economy today and the giant expansion in federal revenues expected this year, Clinton Democrats can be excused for a bit of chest-thumping. But even in the latest budget, as Chait bemoans, "Clinton ... has agreed to institute a supply side tax cut." With Clinton's approval, Republicans will reduce the top rate from 28 percent to 20 percent—a 40 percent cut.

This presents a wonderful real-life experiment. Why bicker about history when we can debate the future? I propose a bet of, say, $2,000 (though I'll go higher) with TNR's editors who are so brimming with anti-supply-side confidence. I contend that, over the next five years, capital gains tax receipts will be higher (adjusted for inflation) than they have been in the previous five years. I have $2,000 that says that a 40 percent rate cut will produce *more* revenue to the Treasury in that period.

Let us see whether THE NEW REPUBLIC's smug writers are willing to put their money where their mouth is. This voodoo economist will be waiting eagerly by the phone.

STEPHEN MOORE
Cato Institute
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

If lower tax rates are such a bad idea, why has almost every country in the world followed Ronald Reagan's example and slashed marginal tax rates? Perhaps this is why, to use Jonathan Chait's words, "Moore and his ilk have actually won the debate."

DANIEL J. MITCHELL
The Heritage Foundation
Washington, D.C.

Jonathan Chait replies:

For non-aficionado readers, this is not a debate between two tax junkies with equivalently valid interpretations of the data. It's a debate between a raving voodoo zealot and a raving but relatively honest person (me). Point one: I'm not denying that total tax receipts grew under Reagan. (Historical tables!) It just doesn't matter. Reagan raised payroll taxes and excise taxes to cover the lost revenue from his income tax cuts. (Point one-and-a-half: it's not contradictory to state that Reagan raised some taxes and cut others.) So, to determine whether tax cuts bring in more revenue, you should look at income tax revenues, not total revenues. And income tax revenues rose half again faster after 1990.

Point two: Reagan cut taxes starting in 1981, so whether or not they were "fully implemented" yet doesn't matter. Bush raised them starting in 1990. It's not fair to start Reagan in 1982 and Bush in 1990.

Point three: Stephen Moore's wager is pointless. *Of course* capital gains receipts will rise if you cut taxes on capital gains. This proves nothing. As Michael Kinsley once put it, if you gave a tax break to people named Newt, lots of people would change their name to Newt, and tax revenues from people named Newt would increase. But tax revenues from people not named Newt would decrease. This isn't a

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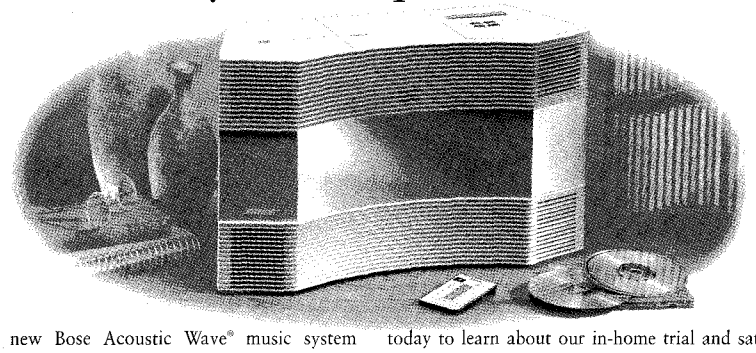

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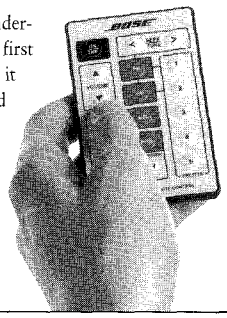

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by Roberto Athayde

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JULY 28, 1997

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

The Senate Governmental Affairs Committee has begun its hearings into campaign finance abuses, but the partisan debate over the committee's goal continues. Republicans want the committee to focus on the wrongdoings of the Clinton administration—in particular, the possibility that the White House directed a systematic effort to subvert U.S. election laws by, among other actions, accepting illegal foreign donations. Democrats, naturally enough, wish to turn the hearings into a broader discussion of bipartisan wrongdoing. Some Democrats want this because they share a legitimate and real desire to fix the campaign finance system; others simply wish to divert critical attention from the accusations against the Clinton White House and the Democratic National Committee.

But the two parties are creating a false dichotomy. Republicans are absolutely right that pursuing allegations against the administration is a necessary and primary task of the committee. In his opening statement, committee chairman Fred Thompson outlined a damning, if by now well-known, narrative. In May 1995, President Clinton granted a visa to Taiwanese President Li Teng-Hui. China, angered, apparently responded with a strategy of covertly gaining sway over American decision-making by funneling donations to congressional campaigns and the Democratic Party. It seems clear enough that there was an attempted purchase of influence, and if indeed the sale went through, that would be a scandal of rarely precedented proportions.

True, everybody in Washington sells access. But, when it comes to foreign policy, corruption of the executive branch is different—not just in magnitude but in kind—from corruption of lesser officials. One bought congressman cannot decide to call the Seventh Fleet back from the straits of Taiwan; one congressman cannot represent the whole of the United States to a foreign government. But the president does represent the nation, and he can call back the fleet. If a foreign power has compromised the integrity of the American government, profound damage has been done to the nation's sovereignty. There are two core questions here: Did this White House, in its hunger to outspend the GOP in 1996, direct an operation that aggressively sought all manner of illegal and questionable donations by giving donors at least the impression that their contributions brought access to the president and at least the possibility of affecting the policy of the United States? And did this White House manage a systematic effort to launder questionable soft-money contributions, in subversion if not in violation of the law, through the DNC and other entities into the Clinton-Gore campaign? To address these questions, which have been publicly and credibly raised, is a duty and a necessity, not, as the White House and congressional Democrats suggest, merely a partisan witch-hunt.

But, just as surely as the Republicans are right to pursue these questions, Democrats are right that the system itself (very much including the GOP) deserves the committee's scrutiny. In fact, there is an important continuum between the foreign money scandals and the widespread, generalized corruption of the political fund-raising system. Foreign special interests would not be seeking to buy influence illegally if domestic special interests had not already been buying it legally. The illegal Clinton fund-raising may have taken wrongdoing to a new level, but it did not represent a break with the past. The post-Watergate campaign finance reforms worked for a brief period, but eventually the parties, federal regulators and the courts blew open enough holes to render them close to meaningless. The laws have at last been stretched so far, so deliberately, so much that the difference between legal and illegal seems almost semantic. The American political system cannot abide another presidential campaign conducted under the rules of 1996.

Earlier this year, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott—never a friend of reform—urged caution: "Before we have reform, I think we ought to find out first of all what laws have been violated that are already on the books." But why wait, when so many of the system's flaws are already so well-publicized—and so many sound proposals already sit languishing in Congress, ready for action? Indeed, the natural intertwining of the legal and the illegal suggests an investigation that encompasses both. There is no real reason why the pervasive ugliness of the campaign finance system should spare Clinton a thorough inquiry. Nor should the illegality of the Clinton campaign allow the Senate to avoid reforming the pervasive ugliness of the system that spawned it. •

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NOTEBOOK

EVERYBODY DOES IT: Only hours after Republicans opened their campaign finance investigation into the Clinton administration, many rushed down the street to pay homage to the star of Washington's last great show trial: Oliver North. The retired Marine colonel celebrated the tenth anniversary of his swashbuckling testimony to Congress in the way the city knows best—a $150-a-plate fund-raiser. The irony didn't seem to daunt Dan Burton, the Indiana Republican who has gone from allegedly shaking down lobbyists for campaign contributions to sleuthing through Democratic campaign coffers. "I've come here to praise Ollie, not to subpoena him," he said cheerfully. Utah Senator Orrin Hatch, the normally judicious head of the Judiciary Committee, offered his own rationalization: "Sacrifice for country is what Ollie North is all about." And California Representative Dana Rohrabacher, whose fiancée will be back in court next month for allegedly violating federal election laws, argued, simply and refreshingly, for a double standard: "We know [Ollie] was doing all kinds of crazy things," he said. "But those were different kinds of days." Perhaps John Huang has nothing to worry about after all.

CRACKIN' UP?: Just how loopy is Marion Barry, the esteemed mayor of Washington, D.C.? On July 5, the mayor-turned-convict-turned-mayor insisted in a CNN interview that the capital—where last week three employees of Starbucks were gunned down and a 7-year-old boy was slain in the backseat of his father's car—is as safe as or safer than Topeka, Kansas. Really? According to FBI stats for last year, in D.C. you are 1.6 times more likely to be the victim of an aggravated assault than in Topeka; 3.3 times more likely to have your car stolen; and five times more likely to be murdered. After being chastised, Barry called the mayor of Topeka to apologize. Next time he should try a more fitting sister city—like Bogota.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL: In Hollywood, they take no chances. If the material was a hit the first time, they use it a second time. When Jimmy Stewart died last week, John Gregory Dunne wrote a knowing little *éloge* on the op-ed page of *The New York Times*. "I met James Stewart on a number of occasions," it began, "but I could never bring myself to call him Jimmy, only Mr. Stewart. Calling him Jimmy would have been like calling Woodrow Wilson 'Woodie.' " This rang a bell. Sure enough, it was the sequel. A few months ago, in *Monster: Living Off the Big Screen*, Dunne's alleged evisceration of the movie business, this groveling passage appears on page 148: "I have a confession to make: I have a hard time calling Robert Redford 'Bob.' He is younger than I am, and yet I would let his diminutive cross my lips only if I could not get his attention by catching his eye or clearing my throat. To me, he is Robert Redford, or just 'Redford' when I am referring to him. In an era of faux egalitarian familiarity, when presidential contenders pass themselves off as Bill and Phil, 'Bob' is somehow diminishing; it would be like calling Woodrow Wilson 'Woody.' " Well, at least somebody is keeping the standard high.

OUR MAN IN MANHATTAN: Last winter, in the face of international diplomatic scorn, the United States denied Boutros Boutros-Ghali a second term as U.N. Secretary-General. The Clinton administration accused him, quite correctly, of resisting sweeping management reform, of coddling autocrats and of just being an arrogant jerk. So in came Kofi Annan, who has proved just as sweet and kindly as the Clinton administration promised. This spring, he proposed management reforms that were breathtaking in their timidity. And then, last week, faced with an autocrat, Laurent Kabila, who insisted the U.N. fire a team of human rights investigators because they had uncovered evidence of mass killing in areas of the eastern Congo under Kabila's control, Annan gave in. The Clinton administration's response to this bout of déjà vu on the East River? They're backing Annan to the hilt. Who says Bill Clinton doesn't stand by his friends?

HOW TO SUCCEED IN POLITICS: With storms of scandals breaking over Washington, party organizers report more and more difficulty recruiting candidates. Not to worry. This month *Campaigns & Elections: The Magazine for Political Professionals* offers politicians twenty-five ways for the smart candidate to win, including: get that degree (Number 3); pay those back taxes (5); raise that cash (7 and 11); develop your campaign message (Number 18: "Every campaign needs a public rationale"); and—this is the hard one—"figure out on your own what you stand for" (2). Oh, and one more thing, every man must have his Morris: hire, hire, hire (8, 14, 16) those political professionals. "If the candidate is tired or has a drink or two at a party," the magazine advises, "the driver is a safety net against DWIs or embarrassing accidents." God save us.

GETTING PETTY: In a July 8 interview on the "Charlie Rose Show," House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt once again insisted his disagreements with the White House were based purely on principle and good for the party. Well, not exactly. According to the July 7 issue of *Roll Call*, the Clinton administration is so peeved with Gephardt it is simply ignoring him, negotiating with more sympathetic Democratic lawmakers on issues like MFN and the budget. Meanwhile, *The Hill* newspaper reported just two days later that they locked horns again when a Democratic leadership staffer ripped out two phone lines typically reserved for White House staffers. Now that's the kind of healthy debate we're looking for. •

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SZCZECIN POSTCARD

POLE VAULTING

By Andrew Nagorski

Look around the liveliest table at the Admiral Cafe in the Baltic port city of Szczecin, and it's easy to see why Poland's economy keeps growing at nearly triple the rate of its sluggish West European counterparts. To the immediate right are the two shipbuilding engineers who made their first real money as high-rise construction workers and are now the region's most successful book wholesalers and the owners of four retail book stores; next to them is the former merchant seaman who runs a management software company; to the left sits the former art preservationist who now manages a twenty-four-hour supermarket, the first in this city of over 400,000 to introduce scanners at its checkout counters; and next to her sits the TV producer who has branched out into CD-ROM production and publishes a new online merchant shipping magazine. When a cell phone rings, the four entrepreneurs reach in unison.

These people are part of a social phenomenon in the post-communist world that has received little notice: the booming emergence of a new middle class. Most media coverage of life in the ex-Soviet bloc has focused on the glitzy, sometimes criminal, nouveau riche and the angry poor, two groups that make for a dangerously volatile society in the absence of a stabilizing third force. That any healthy society must have a strong middle class has long been accepted. Dissing the rich and the poor in 421 B.C., Euripides wrote: "Between the two extremes lie those who make the state secure and uphold the laws." In Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary—the most successful countries in the region—the new middle class is playing that stabilizing role, media spin to the contrary.

The combination of stability and growth explains why these three countries have been invited to join NATO, and why they will be prime candidates for European Union membership when the club opens its doors. It also undercuts the pessimists' view that communism's fall would lead to economic and political upheavals unless Western nations poured in massive aid. The new middle class is winning the post-cold war battle largely on its own, with only modest Western support. Admittedly, in the chaotic transition from communism to capitalism, anyone with initiative had to skirt many of the byzantine regulations—or, to put it bluntly, they had to cheat the taxman and other bureaucrats at every opportunity. But in the more successful societies of Central Europe, the anything-goes era is giving way to a revival of civic responsibility, the virtues of the once reviled bourgeoisie. In Poland, the bourgeoisie is even organized. Last year, Jerzy Samborski, a Warsaw magazine publisher, organized the Middle Class Association, which has already attracted 35,000 members.

By and large, today's Central European middle class wants more sensible laws that can be obeyed. They are pushing to replace unreasonably high tax rates that encourage widespread evasion with lower, more enforceable rates. And they are seeking tax deductions for private medical expenses and tuition costs at private schools for their children; in both cases, they argue, they are relieving pressure on the overburdened public sector.

Their motives are not, of course, entirely selfless. But, to their credit, some members of the new middle class are reaching out to the less fortunate by turning to private social activism. The book wholesalers in Szczecin donate reading material to children's homes, and the twenty-four-hour supermarket funds local after-school activities, plus field trips and gifts for deaf-mute children. "The Western ethos of helping others is beginning to penetrate our middle class," says Polish sociologist Henryk Domanski.

Who comprise the new middle class? Though real income is rising for most parts of the population, these are the people whose gains are most dramatic. They make up, for example, a large percentage of those Poles who bought more than 371,000 new cars last year, up 41 percent from the year before. Or of the Czechs and Hungarians who are flocking to new American-style shopping malls in Prague and Budapest.

Membership is as much a question of attitude as of purchasing power. "If you don't feel yourself to be middle class, you don't behave as middle class," explains Czech sociologist Petr Mateju. It's partly a generational matter. Young Poles, Czechs and Hungarians are far more optimistic than either their parents or their counterparts in Western Europe. And Central Europe's younger generation is fast acquiring new skills: special schools offering cram courses in foreign languages, computer literacy and business training are cropping up everywhere. But the most common trait, for members of all ages, is a belief in the fundamental capitalist ethic: hard work and saving, not instant wealth, as the road to self-improvement. "After the changes, people thought they could get rich immediately," says Edit Kassa, a self-employed Budapest accountant. "Now people understand it takes time." Plenty of their countrymen are not so delighted and make up a formidable backlash vote easily exploited by populists of the left and right. But the new middle class is also in the vanguard of the shift away from a destructive egalitarianism, which meant cutting others down rather than lifting oneself up.

The new middle class still has a long way to go. Even with continued strong growth, according to economists, their countries will probably need about twenty years to

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catch up with West European living standards. And, as the Czech Republic's current economic crisis demonstrates, there are no guarantees against backsliding—especially when economic reforms are not accompanied by reasonable regulations to guard against insider trading and other abuses. Since the new middle classers eagerly play the new stock markets, they are among the first victims of such shenanigans.

Western advisers can help, but not, as the silly talk has it, with another Marshall Plan. The political will doesn't exist either in Washington or Western Europe. It's far more important to encourage more private Western investment, which is already changing the economic landscape by offering new jobs and spawning a managerial class working for multinational corporations. And it's important to push the European Union toward the politics of inclusion that NATO is embracing. Nothing matters more to the new middle class than feeling that they can now enjoy the political security and economic stability that West Europeans have long taken for granted.

Members of the new middle class already believe they are narrowing the East-West gap, motivating them to push harder for themselves and for their children. Ask the folks at the Admiral Cafe about their kids, and they talk about English lessons, travel and other educational opportunities they intend to provide. "I'm fulfilling the dreams of my childhood, for myself and my daughter," says Piotr Hrynkiewicz, a co-owner of the Szczecin book wholesalers. It's a classic—and proven—middle-class recipe, schmaltz and all: dare to dream, and then work, work, work to make the dream come true.

ANDREW NAGORSKI, *Newsweek*'s Berlin bureau chief, is the author of *The Birth Of Freedom* (Simon and Schuster).

Why are we in Mir?

SPACE ODDITY

By Stephen Glass

Mission to Mir, a new IMAX movie at the National Air and Space Museum, opens with a scene that looks like something out of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*—a scene in which puzzled Third World natives are carting a crashed UFO back to their mud-hut village. Strapped to a slow, rickety train, a rocket moves in fits and starts across the plains of Kazakhstan. An eclectic group of people—peasant women garbed in long, colorful skirts and sweaters, soldiers in somewhat ratty military uniforms and a handful of men dressed like crossing guards—wander aimlessly around the spaceship, looking as if they are not sure what exactly the director intends for them to be doing here. It turns out that these people are ferrying to the launch site the pride of the Russian space program: the Soyuz, which carries cosmonauts from Earth to the Mir space station.

The point of the IMAX film is to glorify Mir, which is kept orbiting the Earth with American involvement and considerable financial support. And, believe it or not, the film is a puff job: the Mir program is in even *worse* shape than you might expect from contemplating the scene of the Soyuz ground crew in action. Originally designed for a five-year spin in space, Mir is now pushing twelve years in orbit, and it is falling apart. Wisconsin Republican James Sensenbrenner, chairman of the House Science Committee, says there have been, in the past six months alone, ten "major crises" aboard Mir, two of them life-threatening. Leaks in the cooling system have caused breathing problems for the crew, oxygen generators have failed, parts of the hull are corroding and even the toilets are backed up. In February, a fire enveloped the astronauts in sparks and smoke. And, of course, in late June, Mir lost half its power after a cargo craft crashed into it.

Until recently, the Clinton administration has all but ignored Mir's complications. White House officials have long hailed Mir as an important symbol of U.S.-Russian cooperation—so important that, over the last five years, the federal government has paid handsomely, $470 million to date, for the privilege of sending American astronauts to join the Russians aboard their space station. Michael Foale, the fifth American to live on Mir, returns in September, and Washington has already paid to send two more astronauts after him.

Only after Mir's crash in orbit last month did NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin rethink sending more astronauts. "First, is it safe?" he told CNN. "And secondly, is there a scientific and technical reason for doing that?" These are excellent questions. Indeed, if the government had honestly asked them before, it would have exposed Mir's dirty little secret: it hasn't been about science for some time, and it certainly hasn't been safe.

To call Mir the Yugo of space stations is perhaps an understatement. In the IMAX movie, Shannon Lucid—who spent more time on Mir than any other American—likens the station to a house where nothing has been thrown out for a decade. It looks dark and cramped; waste is everywhere. Mir is in such disarray that when Lucid lost her shoe it took days to find it—and that was only after she bribed the cosmonauts, with a bag of Jello, to help her search.

True, nobody ever said space travel had to be comfortable. Nor did anybody say it was without risks. "It's not supposed to be safe; it's a frontier," explains Rick Tumlinson, president of the Space Frontier Foundation, a group of scientists and experts who advocate increased space exploration. "If Mir astronauts didn't want to take risks, they would have gone to work with the post office."

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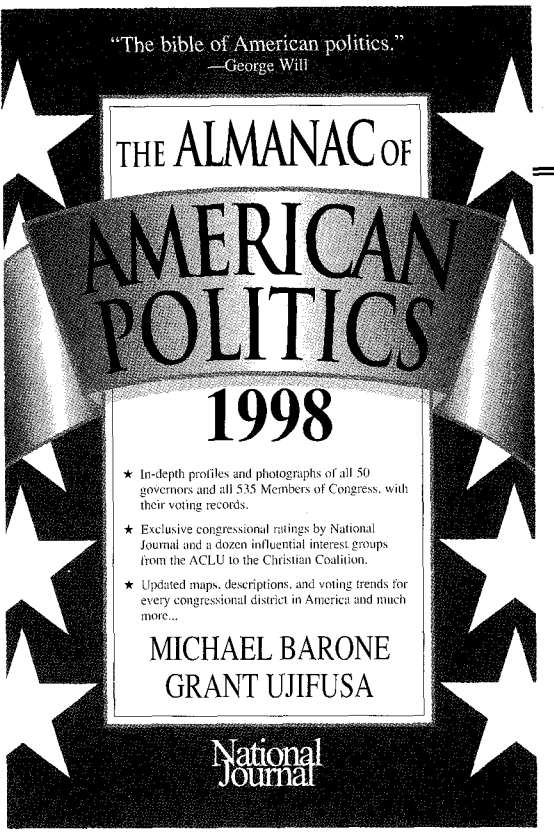
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But what makes the risks of space travel worthwhile is the promise of scientific gain—and Mir has stopped providing that. Originally, NASA wanted to use Mir to test the Space Shuttle's ability to dock with a space station. Yet Jim Lovell, the famed commander of Apollo 13, has said repeatedly that, after five manned missions, the U.S. has plenty of docking information. Another research aim was to learn how the body adjusts to long-term weightlessness, but scientists agree that here, too, the U.S. already has sufficient information.

In response to such objections, Mir boosters have come up with a more creative rationale for continued missions: life aboard the space jalopy gives U.S. astronauts crisis management experience. "Someday when there's a fire aboard one of our spaceships to Mars or Venus, we'll extinguish it," explained a NASA official. "That day we'll think back and say thank you to the Russians."

Of course, some defenders of the program are more forthright—they admit, if not always publicly, that Mir's primary goal has been diplomatic. Surely, they say, it's good to have Americans and Russians working together instead of competing. And at $100 million a year—out of a $13.5 billion NASA budget—supporters say the program is a relatively cheap way to buy goodwill. But, in a different light, Mir doesn't seem like such a bargain: it is worth almost half the $225 million the administration proposed spending this year in direct aid to Russia.

A more practical, though less publicized, goal has been to keep Russian engineers employed. America's room and board payments play a significant role in keeping the desperately broke Russian space program stumbling along, and that, the geopoliticians say, is important. When the Soviet Union collapsed, there was reason to fear that out-of-work Russian engineers might decide to work for North Korea and other rogue states interested in less peaceful applications of rocket technology. "They were undergoing a big downsizing, so we said sell spaceships to rich people, meaning us, instead of missiles to poor people," says John Pike, the director of the space policy project at the Federation of American Scientists. Today, many experts worry that, if the U.S. doesn't keep buying flights, the Mir program might die. The Russians are so hard-pressed for cash that they have resorted to selling rides on Mir to civilians—a Japanese journalist bought one for $12 million—and to allowing Pepsi to make a $5 million television ad from space. Most recently, they've launched a "Civilian In Space" sweepstakes.

The problem with this line of argument is that there is a perfectly good way to keep Russian scientists employed, further the goals of science and more directly help the U.S. space program—all without putting American lives at such risk. Instead of subsidizing Mir, Washington could just pump more money into the U.S.-led international space station, parts of which will be built by Russian scientists and manufacturers.

Some U.S. lawmakers warn that pulling the plug on Mir could embarrass the Russians and spoil relations. When Sensenbrenner said last week that NASA should conduct its own safety checks on Mir, Russian Space Agency chief Yuri Koptev bristled. "Excuse me, please," Koptev told reporters, "but your congressmen don't say anything about halting flights of the [Space] Shuttle after the recent unpleasantness when one of the ... generators failed. Well, so, as soon as you stop the shuttle flights, we'll think of stopping the Mir flights."

Those sentiments may prevail, given the White House's general reluctance to confront Moscow and past tolerance for Mir debacles. In the interim, Mir will continue to orbit the Earth—until an accident sacrifices more than U.S. and Russian relations. •

A poison pill for Medicare.

CARELESS

By John B. Judis

As Republicans and Democrats tangle over Medicare this summer, one thing is clear to both sides: the program needs help. The fund that pays the hospital bills of more than 35 million Americans will go into the red in 2001 unless expenditures are reduced or revenues are raised. The challenge is to make these changes fairly and efficiently. The 1,000-page Medicare reform legislation that passed the House and the Senate in late June as part of the budget reconciliation bills doesn't meet this test. In fact, it doesn't even come close.

The bills, which a Senate and House conference must still reconcile, contain numerous provisions—all of them couched in a nearly impenetrable jargon—that would transfer the real costs of rescuing the system to Medicare beneficiaries. The bills may even aggravate the long-term

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economic problems of rising health-care and Medicare costs. And they include several so-called reforms that would subvert Medicare's ability to provide roughly equal access to health care to retired Americans.

The first problem is that the bills reduce the projected rate of spending by primarily targeting hospitals, which can pass their increased costs on to patients through reducing the quality and comfort of care, while exempting physicians and insurance companies. According to the journal *Modern Healthcare*, physicians will absorb only about 5 percent of the spending cuts, even though spending on physicians accounts for 15 percent of Medicare costs. At a time when, as Harris Meyer reports in *Hospitals & Health Networks*, physician fees from Medicare increasingly exceed those from private managed care, Congress proposes to increase physician payments by 3 percent a year.

More troubling, the bills claim to reduce spending by moving Medicare recipients from traditional, fee-for-service insurance plans (in which patients can choose any doctor and in which the choice of treatment is at the physician's discretion) to health maintenance organizations and other managed care plans (in which the choice of doctors is restricted and treatment options are limited to hold down costs). In theory, that should work because managed care plans have an incentive to reduce the volume of services. In the drafting of this legislation, though, the insurance lobbies were able to extract concessions from Congress that will eliminate any potential savings.

Medicare currently reimburses managed care plans by calculating how big a bill the average fee-for-service patient racks up annually. It then agrees to pay a managed care plan 95 percent of that for every patient the plan enrolls. In theory, Medicare should be saving the difference—5 percent—for every patient who transfers into managed care. But HMOs and other managed care plans tend to attract healthier members of the Medicare-eligible population: people who are lured by such perks as eye or dental care but are not so worried about chronic or terminal illnesses. These patients cost less, on average, than the 95 percent the government pays. So, rather than saving money, the government ends up spending too much to cover these people—and the managed care companies make a nifty profit.

To reclaim this windfall for the Medicare program, the Clinton administration proposed that Medicare pay 90 percent rather than 95 percent of per capita costs. But managed care lobbyists persuaded Republican lawmakers not only to ditch the administration's proposal, but to drop the 95 percent rule as well. Under the new, enormously complicated formula, managed care plans will probably receive somewhere between 95 and 100 percent of the average—more, in some cases, than they collect now. If HMOs and managed care plans can continue to encourage enrollment by healthy seniors—and there are now consulting firms that specialize in helping managed care plans do just that—they will make out like bandits under the proposed reforms. At the same time, the core Medicare program, burdened by a growing percentage of the most sickly seniors, could see its costs rise, creating a new crisis for Medicare down the road.

While both plans burden beneficiaries with increased premiums and new copayments, the Senate plan goes even further, raising the age of eligibility from 65 to 67 and increasing premiums on upper-income recipients. Means-testing—that is, increasing the premiums relatively well-off recipients must pay—is worth considering. But the Senate plan, which affects 5 percent of Medicare beneficiaries, only raises about $4 billion over five years. That's a small gain for a policy change that would subtly alter Medicare's status as a universal social insurance program.

Raising the age to 67 might produce minor gains in the program's fiscal balance by shifting health costs from Medicare back to private insurance, but it would probably increase the nation's overall spending on health care, because private insurance costs are not as closely regulated as Medicare costs. It would also put immense pressure on employee retirement programs, which provide benefits until Medicare kicks in; increase the ranks of the uninsured; and raise overall private insurance rates. Most important, it would renege on the historic promise of Medicare by exacerbating retired Americans' worries about meeting their health care costs.

In the long run, raising the eligibility age might not even save Medicare money because it would remove healthier (that is, younger) Americans from the Medicare insurance pool. Also, Medicare would still have to pay for serious illnesses of 65 to 67 year olds who are eligible for disability insurance. "It won't save as much money as many people think, and it will cause hardship," says the Urban Institute's Marilyn Moon.

Both bills are filled with egregious concessions to special interests that actually make Medicare more expensive while undermining the program itself. Again, you have to read the fine print. Under what it calls a "Medicare Plus" program, the House would permit 500,000 Medicare recipients to buy Medical Savings Accounts (MSAs). Under the plan, Medicare would take its average per capita payment and return it to a Medicare recipient as a voucher. Each recipient would use part of the voucher to purchase a catastrophic insurance policy—basically, a policy with a high deductible (like $6,000), which is only helpful in case of a major illness or accident. The recipient could then take the remainder—say $1,000 to $1,500—and deposit it in a tax-free Medical Savings Account that would generate interest. If the recipient gets sick, he or she can draw on the money to defray part of the treatment costs; if not, the recipient can take the extra money just so long as he or she leaves enough to cover the deductible.

It's not hard to guess who likes this idea: MSAs are the darling of medium-sized insurance companies and major Republican contributors, like Golden Rule Insurance Co. of Indianapolis, that are searching for a niche

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in a Medicare market dominated by giants like Blue Cross. Another major GOP contributor, the American Medical Association, also favors MSAs because, under them, doctors are not subject to Medicare restrictions on fees. But it's not as obvious who will buy these policies. No senior citizen of modest means will want to risk getting sick and losing thousands of dollars. Nor will anyone with an existing illness buy an MSA. At best, Medicare MSAs would appeal to wealthy Medicare recipients with no history of serious illness who believe they can gamble a few thousand dollars on the policy in exchange for being able to spend their excess savings or buy health care from doctors who are unwilling to take Medicare fees. If they do get sick, they can cut their losses after only a year by transferring back to regular Medicare.

Conservative ideologues insist that MSAs will save money by discouraging frivolous health-care purchases, but the Congressional Budget Office and nearly every respectable health expert disagree. Because MSAs will siphon off healthier senior citizens from the general Medicare insurance pool, the CBO estimates that, over five years, the Republican experiment will cost Medicare an extra $2 billion. In the Senate, moderate Republicans joined Democrats to dilute the MSA plan, permitting only 100,000 enrollees and restricting the size of deductibles and out-of-pocket payments. But Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott has vowed to make the final version of the bill closer to that of the House than the Senate.

There are more such boondoggles. In a concession to the AMA, the House and Senate bills permit doctors and hospitals to establish provider service organizations that would not be subject to state regulations on managed care plans. In another, even bolder, concession, the House bill limited rewards for non-economic loss in medical malpractice suits to $250,000. That means families could not receive punitive damages above $250,000 if retired wives, husbands or parents died through medical negligence. Since these cases usually cost several hundred thousand dollars to argue, most malpractice victims would be discouraged from bringing them to court. Insurance rates would go down, but senior citizens would lose their most powerful weapon against medical wrongdoing.

How was it possible for Congress to create such bad bills? One reason is simply that the AMA and insurance companies like the Cigna Corporation and Golden Rule have flooded GOP coffers. Another reason is conservative opposition to Medicare as a government program. The House leadership, the Cato Institute and *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page want to restore the private, voluntary system that existed before 1964. They envisage MSAs as a kind of Trojan horse within the Medicare system.

But Senate Democrats and the Clinton administration are also at fault. Democrats like Bob Kerrey have become so obsessed with reducing government entitlements that they mistake purely fiscal palliatives—such as raising the age of Medicare eligibility—for long-term economic cures. Meanwhile, the Clinton administration has been willing to subordinate its own misgivings about the Medicare provisions to its desire to get a balanced budget agreement with the Republicans. California Representative Pete Stark, the ranking Democrat on the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, commented to *Congress Daily* after Clinton agreed to the outlines of the House bill, "All they want is a deal so the president can talk about his budget deal instead of Paula Jones. It's the Paula Jones budget." That's cruel, but it pretty much sums up the administration's contribution to this year's sordid and sorry Medicare debate. •

Who shall rule—Congress or the Court?

DUAL SOVEREIGNS

By Jeffrey Rosen

Since the Progressive era, this magazine has argued for judicial restraint as part of a broader argument for liberal nationalism. Judges should defer to the prerogatives of Congress and the president, the argument goes, so that popular sovereignty can serve as the engine of national unity. And so, in 1918, when the Supreme Court held that Congress's power to regulate interstate commerce didn't authorize it to ban the products of child labor, the editors complained that "a bare majority" had imposed on the nation its "dubious preference for exclusively local regulation." In 1935, when the Supreme Court unanimously struck down the code-making process of the National Recovery Act, the centerpiece of the New Deal, as an unconstitutional delegation of Congress's authority, the editors de-

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nounced the Court for its "reversal of the trend toward nationalism and a return to doctrines of states' rights." In 1937, the Court finally relented and got out of the business of enforcing constitutional limits on congressional power; since then, THE NEW REPUBLIC has been preoccupied with another kind of judicial activism: the Warren-Burger era's expansion of individual rights.

But this year, for the first time since 1937, the Court has decided to take seriously the proposition that the authority of "the Federal government," as Justice Kennedy put it in his opinion striking down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), "is one of enumerated powers." And, for liberal and conservative partisans of judicial restraint, it's hard to know whether or not to become hysterical. In 1997, unlike 1935, the Court's muscle-flexing is unlikely to provoke the president or Congress to respond in kind. Far from paralyzing the federal government, the Court has struck down feel-good laws, such as the Brady bill and the Gun-Free Schools Act. Laws like these are cheap symbols of federal virtue that interject the national government into areas that have traditionally, and properly, been left to the states. Indeed, as Congress and the president increasingly trivialize federal power by brandishing it for the sake of appearances, nationalism itself seems a tarnished ideal.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The Court's new resolve to check lazy and ill-advised federalization may be good public policy; but some of the recent decisions are bad constitutional law. By ignoring constitutional text, misrepresenting constitutional history and overlooking the legacy of Reconstruction and the New Deal, the conservative justices are guilty of precisely the kind of judicial activism that they rightly criticized on the Warren Court. And the Court's effort to segregate the federal and state governments by resurrecting the antebellum vision of "dual sovereignty," if carried to its logical conclusion, could call into question not only the symbolic laws that have been struck down so far, but a host of more important regulatory schemes—from welfare reform to environmental standards—organized around the principle of cooperative federalism.

In the Brady bill case, the Court held that Congress can't compel state officers to execute or administer federal laws. In the RFRA case, the Court held that Congress's power to "enforce" the guarantees of the Fourteenth Amendment is limited to remedying constitutional violations by the states, and that Congress has no power to change the substance of constitutional rights. In two other recent decisions, the Court held that principles of state "sovereign immunity" dramatically restrict Congress's power to authorize federal courts to enforce rights arising under federal law. And, in 1995, the Court held that Congress's power to regulate interstate commerce doesn't include the power to prohibit guns in schools.

The most troubling aspect of the Brady and sovereign immunity decisions is their lack of mooring in the constitutional text. When Justice Stevens read his dissent from the bench in the Brady case, he remarked spontaneously that Justice Scalia's opinion for the Court reminded him of Justice Douglas's opinion in the *Griswold* contraceptives case of 1965, which extrapolated a right to privacy from the Constitution's "penumbras" and "emanations." And Justice Kennedy, in his opinion in the Idaho sovereign immunity case, mischaracterized recent precedents and ignored the plain language of the Eleventh Amendment, which sets out specific limits on "the Judicial power of the United States," rather than establishing, as Justice Kennedy would have it, additional limits on *congressional* power.

The source of the Court's rhetoric of "dual sovereignty" and "dual federalism" is not constitutional text but antebellum history. Although the conservatives pose as defenders of states' rights, they are, in fact, drawing on an unexpectedly nationalistic tradition.

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"Dual federalism" was a doctrine developed by Chief Justice John Marshall and his disciple Joseph Story, who held that the federal and state governments should be as separate and distinct as the governments of two states. The anti-Federalists had originally sought concurrent responsibility for administering federal law, which they thought would increase state power; but in a famous compromise, the Philadelphia Convention rejected that vision in favor of the system of "dual sovereignty" in which the states and federal government each had exclusive control over their own spheres.

The overriding goal of "dual federalism," as it developed during the Marshall era, was to protect a weak national government from the power-hungry states, rather than weak states from a bullying national government. In 1842, Justice Story held that states couldn't carry out important federal duties (such as protecting the right of slave owners to recover their fugitive slaves) because state officials were too parochial, venal and demagogic to be trusted with national responsibilities. And the question of who was sovereign, the people of each state or the people of the United States, was settled at Appomattox.

If the Supreme Court is seriously committed to resurrecting the antebellum vision of "dual sovereignty," the states might be reinvigorated, but in a more subtle way than the Court's crude rhetoric suggests. In the short term, many of the post-New Deal regulatory schemes that the state and federal governments administer together might be called into question. For example, the welfare reform act of 1996, which directs the states to administer federal block grants, might be unconstitutional under the principle announced in the Brady case. So might the motor voter law, which commands state licensing agencies to register federal voters. So might the Environmental Protection Agency's regulations that delegate the administration of federal clean water standards to certain states. So might scores of unfunded mandates. And so might the reporting requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

If the Court continues to bar the states from sharing in federal responsibilities, Justices Stevens and Breyer predict that the states will ultimately suffer. The federal government, they suggest, will create massive federal bureaucracies to administer programs that used to be administered as federal-state partnerships. But Stevens's and Breyer's fears may prove to be overstated. A president who insists that the era of big government is over and a Congress led by laissez-faire Republicans are unlikely to create massive federal bureaucracies.

As Roderick Hills of the University of Michigan argues, the future of federalism will hinge on the Court's vision of Congress's spending power. If the justices decide that Congress can't intrude on state sovereignty by imposing elaborate conditions on federal spending, the states could indeed suffer greatly; for Congress would stop using state officials to carry out important federal functions. The federal government would assume exclusive responsibility for welfare, Social Security, Medicaid and defense; the states would be reduced to regulating firearms within 1,000 feet of schools.

But it seems highly unlikely that a majority of the Court will resurrect the vision of the spending power that led President James Madison to veto an internal improvements bill, on the grounds that Congress lacked the enumerated power to build highways. As long as Congress can use its spending power to encourage states to administer federal programs *voluntarily*, Hills suggests, the Brady decision could ultimately prove to be a victory for state power, because it will increase the states' ability to bargain for larger grants and more discretion.

It is difficult to imagine how far the Court intends to press its vision of dual federalism, largely because it is difficult to resurrect antebellum notions in a post-New Deal world. After Reconstruction and the New Deal, however, we can no longer say, as Madison did, that the powers of the national government are few and defined. The New Deal crisis was solved in 1937, when the Court acknowledged that the national and local economies had become increasingly intertwined, and judges could no longer distinguish local "manufacture," over which the states had exclusive control, from national "commerce," which was the sole responsibility of Congress.

The manufacturing-commerce distinction collapsed in 1937 not simply in the face of FDR's court-packing threats, but also in the face of the economic realities of the New Deal regulatory state. The attempt to distinguish local production from its national effects became increasingly unrealistic in a global economy, which makes Justice Thomas's attempt to resurrect the distinction in 1997 a provocative but self-indulgent academic exercise. And so, between 1937 and 1995, federal courts suggested, with winks and nods, that nothing Congress decided to regulate, from backyard vegetable gardens to racial discrimination, had effects on interstate commerce too remote to be impermissible.

Viewed in a charitable light, the federalism decisions of 1997 are an earnest effort by the Court to resurrect coherent limits on congressional power in an age when it is no longer clear that coherent limits can be resurrected. Ever since the Court abandoned the effort to police the boundaries of federal power in 1937, the states have become more trustworthy partners of the federal government, and more tempting targets of federal commandeering. This is why the Court's solution in the Brady case—allowing Congress to encourage the states to administer federal programs voluntarily, as long as it is willing to pay them for their trouble—could be seen as a creative attempt to translate the nineteenth-century principles of federalism into a post-New Deal world.

The Court is surely right, furthermore, that most serious threats to federalism today come not from

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overly powerful state governments, as in the 1840s, but from a federal government that is increasingly addicted to symbolic legislation. The Gun-Free Schools Act is troubling for the same reason as the Americans with Disabilities Act: both noisily declare the federal government's opposition to evils that no one supports, and then order the states to worry about the details of enforcement. In this way, Congress and the president can reap political benefits without incurring corresponding political costs. And when feel-good laws co-opt state officers to administer programs whose political benefits accrue to Congress alone, it seems fair to wonder whether Justice Stevens is correct that "unelected judges are better off leaving the protection of federalism to the political process in all but the most extraordinary circumstances."

But, although the Brady decision may be defensible as a matter of public policy, it's hard to defend as a matter of constitutional law. Justice Scalia's opinion for the Court brings to mind the excesses of the Warren Court, with its overconfident tone, its misuse of history and its offhandedness about unsettling laws and precedents without pretending to glance at the constitutional text. ("Because there is no constitutional text speaking to this precise question," says Scalia, sounding very much like Justice Brennan, the answer must be sought "in historical understanding and practice, in the structure of the Constitution, and in the jurisprudence of this Court.")

It's tempting, for those who sympathize with the Court's decisions on policy grounds, to forgive the justices for their activist turn. In an age when the president and Congress have marginalized themselves by embracing the politics of symbolic legislation, the people are unlikely to take to the streets in defense of federal prerogatives. By contrast, the Supreme Court, flush with self-confidence, enjoys and deserves far more popular respect than either of the political branches.

But, to maintain that respect, the Court should resist the temptation to save the president and Congress from their own excesses. A recurring lesson of constitutional politics in the twentieth century is the overriding importance of judicial humility. In applauding the demise of "dual federalism" in 1937, Edwin Corwin wrote: "The obstinate adherence of the Court in recent years to outmoded doctrines which were largely of its own fabrication, and the arrogance of certain of its opinions during this period, showed the Court to be in the grip of a gravely erroneous conception of its place in our system." If the conservative justices intend to start down this self-aggrandizing path again, perhaps they should recall how history has treated their predecessors. •

The Secretary of Defense, forever becoming.

THE DOUBLE MAN

By Charles Lane

William Sebastian Cohen was born fifty-seven years ago in Bangor, Maine, the first son of a mixed marriage. Cohen's mother, Clara Hartley, was an Irish Protestant from Aroostook County, one of the poor state's poorest rural backwaters, and she was notable both for her beauty and her independence. "She does not care about public opinion," Cohen once told *Yankee* magazine. "She dismisses it. Absolutely serene, no matter what people might say." In his memoir, Cohen writes, "any measure of independence that I have today, I attribute to her example of self-esteem and self-confidence." Clara Hartley's strength must have been tested in Cohen's childhood. She had married Reuben "Ruby" Cohen, a Jew who migrated to Maine from the Lower East Side and first impressed his future wife by the way he played saxophone at a local dance hall. Ruby Cohen, his son has said, was "like a *Fiddler on the Roof* character"—a man who could handle himself in a fistfight or a billiard game, and who sweated out a living in his bakery, the Bangor Rye Bread Co., eighteen hours a day, six days a week, from 1929 until 1995, when, at the age of 86, he collapsed on the job and died.

Ruby Cohen, it seems, did care about public opinion; he liked people and wanted to be liked. His livelihood depended on keeping the customers satisfied, which is why he not only personally baked the bread, but personally delivered it. When his son Billy heard anti-Semitic taunts, as he often did, Ruby counseled him not to show anger or fight back. "Kill 'em with kindness," he would say. This was not easy. Two Saturdays a month, Billy Cohen went to Hebrew school, as his father wished. On the other Saturdays, he played ball at the Young Men's Christian Association, as he himself pre-

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ferred. But he never felt accepted on either side of what he has called his "split heritage." His Hebrew school classmates resented him, because his absences cost their group the perfect attendance prize. Cohen felt even more hostility from the other side. Once, when he was pitching in a youth baseball game, an adult spectator threw cans at him, shouting, "Send the Jew boy home!" Cohen has said that he has never forgotten how helpless he felt, standing on that mound, muttering, "But don't you understand: I'm not...."

As Cohen was approaching his thirteenth birthday, and the Bar Mitzvah for which he had been studying, the disjunction between his two worlds became a crisis. The rabbi in Bangor informed him he had a problem. Only the children of mothers who are born Jewish or convert are considered Jewish. Since Clara Hartley had not converted, her son would have to do so himself before he could be confirmed in the faith. He would be immersed in the *mikvah*, or ritual bath, and would then undergo *hatafat dam brit*, or drawing the blood of the covenant. In lieu of a religious circumcision, the rabbi would extract a symbolic drop of blood from the boy's penis.

Twelve-year-old Billy Cohen was understandably angry and frightened. He ran to his mother, weeping, and begged her to stop it. She intervened with his father, and the boy was spared *hatafat dam brit*. Instead, Billy Cohen staged a conversion ritual of his own. He walked to the banks of the Penobscot River, behind his father's bakery. He snapped off the *mezuzah* he wore on a chain around his neck and hurled it into the brown water. "Now I don't have to be a part of that ever again," he told himself. "I'm through pretending."

Cohen would later call this moment of truth on the Penobscot the "turning point" in his life; his break with Jewish orthodoxy was, he said, a liberation: "When I was finally able to say, and to know, that I was alone, it was really the beginning for me."

From then on, his home became the basketball court at the YMCA. When the Y was closed, he would practice outdoors in the bitter Maine winter until his ears ached and his hands bled. He whipped himself into one of the best high-school players the state had ever seen. At Bowdoin College, Cohen excelled both at basketball and in the study of the classics. After Bowdoin, he resisted his father's advice to become an orthodontist and his own notion to try out for pro basketball. He "gravitated," as he put it, to Boston University Law School and, after a fairly brief passage through the practice of law, made an "escape" from the law into what would be his life's work, politics.

With his sports star past and his natural appeal, Cohen rose quickly, winning a seat in Congress by the age of 32. He served three terms as the representative of Maine's Second District and then ran for the Senate in 1978. He won that race and two more after it, staying in the Senate until 1996, when he passed up an easy bid for a fourth term and quit. Shortly after the November 1996 election, President Clinton nominated him for Secretary of Defense, an appointment quickly confirmed by his former colleagues.

Over the course of his political career, Cohen confronted many divisive issues, from Watergate to Bosnia. His approach was always the same. He stood alone, impartial and judgmental, and he wrestled, not so much with questions of policy or politics as with his own doubts. The real issues for him were always the same ones first dramatically limned back in Bangor: doctrinal purity vs. individual conscience; group loyalty vs. personal integrity.

He was, of course, above mere politics. His role model as a Maine Republican was Margaret Chase Smith, the woman senator who opposed Joe McCarthy and drew votes from both independents and Democrats. End-running the Republican organization based in the state legislature, Cohen sold himself as a fellow outsider to Maine's traditionally Democratic minority group, ethnic French Canadians. His first big act on the national stage was both an act of high principle and one of partisan betrayal: in 1974, he was the lone Republican on the House Judiciary Committee who voted to demand that Richard Nixon turn over the White House tapes, a move that set the stage for the committee's vote to impeach.

Cohen won much praise for this act of conscience, but, over the years, some colleagues suspected him not of love of principle but of a species of love of self. He was, it seemed, not a rebel without a cause but a rebel on every cause, a man for whom the iconoclasm of the cool and independent overview trumped considerations of loyalty and purpose. In 1979, Cohen spoke out against Jimmy Carter's weak SALT II deal with the Soviet Union. But, when Ronald Reagan succeeded Carter, Cohen chided him for proposing to exceed the weapons limits imposed by that still-unratified treaty. Like a Republican, he fought fraud in the Social Security disability program, bashed the Department of Education and advocated "the stern virtues of self-discipline and fiscal prudence." But, like a Democrat, he was pro-choice, favored tax increases and supported affirmative action.

Indeed, Cohen's own deepest puzzlement and his strongest disdain were reserved for moral absolutism itself. He was a "no easy answers" man, the sort of senator who would hail "the art of moderation." He embraced doubt, reveled in relativism, wallowed in ambivalence and ambiguity. He did not seem to particularly enjoy or respect the actual slog-work of legislating. In twenty-four years in Congress, he wrote dozens of op-eds, gave countless speeches at the Brookings Institution. He never chaired a committee. In his memoir, *Roll Call*, he quoted, earnestly, from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*: "He rejects the here, is unhappy with it, wants to be farther up the trail but when he gets there will be just as unhappy because then *it* will be 'here.'" The citizenry itself, with its "loss of faith," "cynicism" and "soft vices of mindless consump-

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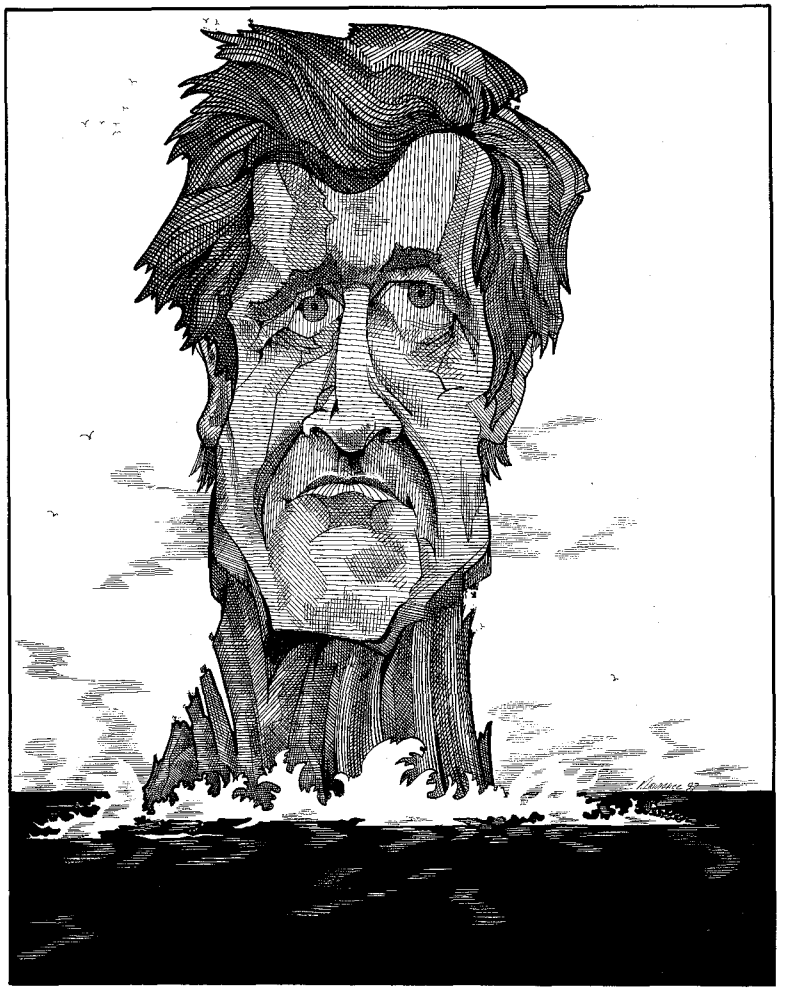
tion and selfish gratification," could exasperate him. When he retired, decrying "the absence of political accord and the increase in personal hostilities that now permeate our system and our society," it was a complaint he had voiced many, many times before.

The pure expression of the mind, in the form of writing, was what Cohen esteemed most, and he even made the time to publish a few prolix novels and verse. Of these, the most nearly successful was *The Double Man*, a spy tale cowritten with Gary Hart, one of Cohen's closest Senate friends. The title is borrowed from a 1,700-line poem written by W.H. Auden in 1940, in which Auden pondered both the crisis in Europe and his own crisis of Christian faith. Auden's poem, in turn, was inspired by a line from Montaigne: "We are, I know not how, double in ourselves, so that we believe what we disbelieve, and cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn." That is Bill Cohen in a nutshell.



WILLIAM COHEN BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

It is easy to mock this poet-pol. But it is a mistake to do so. He postures completely in earnest, and his chronic doubts give him an ironic power: the power to disrupt. So the question people are asking about Secretary of Defense Cohen, says one of Clinton's former Cabinet officers, is whether "the president has bitten off more independence than he can chew." In this widely held view, Cohen's resignation on principle someday is all but inevitable. Already, Cohen has taken the occasion of a high-level meeting to remind the president: "I voted against your Bosnia policy." A more pressing issue, though, is whether Cohen's flaming moderation is really the style of civilian control that America's huge, efficient, but rather directionless military establishment really needs. Cohen and the armed forces face issues of money, strategy and technology that cannot necessarily be split down the middle. And when it comes time for the wrenching decisions over why and how to use force, in Bosnia or elsewhere, do we want a Double Man to help make the call?

In many respects, the job Cohen began six months ago was made for him. As the sole Republican in Clinton's Cabinet, he has ratified the role of his life: the man above politics, the odd man out. But the job has not, so far, gone smoothly. Cohen's military strategy plan, the Quadrennial Defense Review, has been panned as too timid, while his boldest stand, his attempted defense of Air Force General John Ralston against an absurd adultery scandal, misfired. Having taken it upon himself to declare that if the sides in Bosnia resume "slaughtering" one another after U.S. troops leave next year, it will be "up to them," he became embroiled in a quasi-public debate with the administration's leading Bosnia moralist, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

The reports of a dispute with the popular Albright do seem to have rattled Cohen. When I met with him at the Pentagon to discuss the matter recently, he was surrounded by note-takers and a highly visible tape-recording device, and even then he replied to questions about Bosnia in only the most cautious terms. "I've gone back and asked Ken Bacon"—the Pentagon's press spokesman—"to go back and get the exact language that Secretary Albright has used, that President Clinton has used and that I've used," he told me. "And they are virtually identical." Everyone says troops out of Bosnia at the end of June 1998, as previously agreed, but meantime we'll redouble our efforts for peace. And Cohen is prepared to be a team player, whatever happens. "The president decides," Cohen adds. "He is the commander-in-chief, and I expect to follow his policies, after making my best arguments."

In one sense, Cohen's spin is correct. Too much has been made of minor differences of emphasis in statements by him, Albright and Clinton. As Cohen says, the president is supposed to decide what to do about Bosnia. And, so far, he really hasn't. But, in another sense, the coverage of Cohen's tiff with Albright has understated the depth of their differences. On the use of force, Albright is an unreserved moralist, confident (at least since the Gulf war) in the capacity of American

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troops to impose both peace and justice in world trouble spots. Cohen holds quite a different view. America "should neither be the policeman of the world, nor a prisoner of events," is one of his stock phrases. Cohen is not unaware of the lessons of Munich, which is part of the reason he finally decided to vote for the Gulf war, after first thinking that sanctions should be given a try. After all, as Auden wrote in *The Double Man*: "When statesmen grave say 'we must be realistic'/the chances are they're weak, and therefore pacifistic." Especially lately, though, in the context of the Clinton administration's post-cold war deployments, Cohen has seemed to place more emphasis on the second half of Auden's formulation: "But when they speak of principles, look out: perhaps/their generals are already poring over maps."

Cohen's strong ambivalence toward the use of force is long-held. When he was a senator, nothing caused him more decisional agony than the idea that young people might be sent to fight and die in some foreign quagmire because of his vote. As he once declared on the Senate floor: "And the hearts that beat so loudly and enthusiastically to do something, to intervene in areas where there is not an immediate threat to our vital interests, when those hearts that had beaten so loudly see the coffins, then they switch, and they say: 'What are we doing there?' " In 1979, when Jimmy Carter proposed registering American men for the draft in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—a decision that happened to coincide with Cohen's own son's sixteenth birthday—Cohen felt, he wrote, a "loneliness ... darker and colder than the distance to the nearest star."

Cohen could see every facet to any question involving force. On NATO expansion, he wrote in 1993, "The West should make haste to extend the benefits of its security institutions to its former adversaries. But the political paranoia and instability that abound in the East dictate that we must do so slowly." Even when one side in a conflict seemed to have a clear moral advantage over the other, Cohen could see the other side's point, too. In July 1993, as the Serbs rolled through Bosnia and the body count rose, Cohen wrote that "none of the Bosnian parties is without sin. The interests of all three must be accommodated." And even when Cohen supported force, he did so with the greatest public reservations. "Doubt," he declared just before casting his 1991 vote for the Gulf war, "sits like a raven on our shoulders and taunts us."

Today, as Secretary of Defense, Cohen still keeps fresh in his mind what he has called "the specter of the rubble in Beirut and that of our exit from the rooftops of Saigon." In this, he is welcome at the Pentagon, a civilian defense chief who shares the generals' conventional wisdom about what sorts of American interests can justify the use of force: basically nothing, except the oil-rich Gulf and the Korean peninsula. But one of the functions of a Secretary of Defense is, as the president's point man in the constitutional scheme of civilian control over the armed forces, to counter the natural reluctance of generals to fight. And in the most important question of force since the Gulf, Cohen's analysis of the situation was exactly like that of the generals, and exactly wrong.

Cohen explained his views on Bosnia in a 1993 *Washington Post* piece titled "IN THE BALKANS: GET REAL." At the time, some did think the Munich analogy applied to the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, seeing it as cross-border aggression from Serbia, and hence a threat to the rules that preserve stability in Europe. But the senator from Maine was not among them. The Vietnam and Lebanon analogies, he wrote, "should counsel us to seek to do what we can and not what we might prefer." The heart of his plan to stop the civil war was an "internationally supervised population relocation to provide each of the three major factions with a contiguous entity under its control." There would be a U.S.-armed Muslim state, bordered by Serb and Croat entities that could associate with their mother nations if they guaranteed minority rights and assured the "departure from power of individuals deemed responsible for war crimes." More ambitious objectives were not achievable.

Of course, Cohen's proposal actually sounds a lot like what came out of Dayton two years later. But the Dayton accord, shaky though it is, was only possible because the Serbs had been made to yield large amounts of territory by the use, finally, of force: the one-two punch in the summer of 1995 of NATO air strikes and a U.S.-supported Croat-Muslim ground offensive. This action, which made even a limited peace possible in Bosnia, was precisely what Cohen and his fellow realists were opposing at the time he wrote his op-ed. In other words, Cohen's "realistic" proposal was actually impractical, because it lacked the one element, U.S. force, that could make it happen.

Even after Dayton, Cohen shrank from deploying American forces on the ground, without which the peace accord was doomed to fail. When President Clinton made it clear he would send troops regardless of Congress's objections, Cohen joined the ranks of those seeking at least to "narrow the mission, and do the best we can to protect the young men and women who are going to be assigned there." "It is one thing to keep warring parties apart, to separate them," he told CNN's Charles Bierbauer in November 1995. "That would be one mission. If, on the other hand, we're also going to be helping to disarm or build down the armaments held by the Bosnian Serbs to build up the capability of the Bosnian Muslims, then we're starting to once again get into the area, a very dangerous area, of picking sides, as we did over in Somalia." He warned against "nation-building" and "mission creep." He suggested that a bid to arrest alleged war criminals—as opposed, presumably, to their "departure from power"—would undermine the peace.

Cohen's evolved position is still in firm accord with that of the military today, as Dayton slowly sinks, and the administration ponders the evident incongruity between the U.S.-led Stabilization Force's passivity on

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the one hand, and the need to force political change, especially in Radovan Karadzic's Republika Srpska, on the other. Purportedly the administration's lengthy review of Bosnia policy, featuring that ballyhooed Albright-Cohen tiff, produced agreement that SFOR would cease its foot-dragging. If so, Cohen isn't advertising the fact. When I asked him if he would be comfortable with the partition of Bosnia, his reply left no doubt that he long ago wrote off the idea of a multiethnic state. "Our policy is to implement Dayton," he replied wearily. "There is some doubt as to whether and how that can be accomplished, that is, to have a unitary state that is multiethnic living in a peaceful relationship with each other. Nonetheless, that's the commitment of the administration; that is what we are trying to support."

To be sure, Cohen's true forte as a senator was not foreign policy as such, but rather the design and budgetary nutrition of the defense establishment itself. To a large extent, this was a matter of home-state politics. The B-52 runways at Loring Air Force Base in the impoverished north of Maine, and the Bath Iron Works naval shipyard, builder of the Aegis cruiser, are the sources of jobs and income to thousands of potential Cohen voters. Their pork-barrel value dictated that Cohen would seek membership on the Armed Services Committee. But, for Cohen, defense policy was also a grim intellectual challenge. Exempt from Vietnam himself because of a college deferment, Cohen felt insecure about national security matters when he went from the House to the treaty-ratifying Senate in 1979. So he sought to master the issues the same way he had mastered basketball. He plunged into the arcana of covert operations and arms control, to the point where, in 1986, he was actually capable of writing a 5,000-word article for *Armed Forces Journal International*, advocating, in blinding detail, the creation of a Defense Special Operations Agency.

As a defense budgeteer and arms strategist, Cohen was, again, determinedly of no fixed address. He favored developing a costly ballistic missile defense, but railed against the $2-billion-a-copy B-2 bomber. His signature proposal, developed in tandem with centrist Democrat Sam Nunn, was the 1983 nuclear "build down." The U.S. and the Soviets could build new warheads, thus meeting their equal "need" to modernize, but would have to eliminate two old weapons each time they did, thus stabilizing deterrence. The idea, representing Cohen's difference-splitting impulse at its most ingenious, was intended to "temper the excesses" of both the nuclear freeze and the Reagan defense buildup, says Alton Frye, a longtime Cohen adviser. And, though it was never enacted, in a heuristic sense the build down did pave the way for the arms reduction ideas Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev pursued.

Thus, today, Cohen's efforts to minimize U.S. military involvement in Bosnia are influenced by another Pentagonal concern: the looming mismatch between the Pentagon's foreseeable budget and the Clinton administration's policy of global military superiority. The U.S. remains committed to preparing for two "major regional contingencies"—that is, wars, most likely in the Persian Gulf and North Korea—even as we shoulder occasional costly operations such as Bosnia, Haiti and the Iraq no-fly zones. But, to sustain its primacy, the U.S. must make simultaneous, and huge, investments in current readiness and in future high-tech weapons, such as the limited ballistic missile defense system Cohen favors. And it must do so within a slimmed-down budget of about $250 billion, in current dollars, each year. When Cohen took office, it appeared the military's current weapons-procurement plans would cost about $15 billion more per year than it was likely to get from Congress.

How does Cohen deal with this aspect of his job? The recently completed Quadrennial Defense Review represented Cohen's first chance to make an impact on this problem, a credible solution to which has been deferred by all of his predecessors since the Bush administration. Basically, he had three options. The first was to leave the military's plans more or less as they are, and try to persuade Congress to supply more cash. A second, more radical approach, however, would try to take advantage of the low-threat "strategic pause" to sharply reduce forces, while pouring the savings into a restructured force built to capitalize on the high-tech "revolution in military affairs." Option Three, the so-called "Full Spectrum" approach, would try for a compromise between the first two: to keep the force structure intact, but trim it to produce savings that could be used to accelerate the gradual pace at which new weapons are currently being introduced.

Cohen tried for Option Three—characteristically, but not necessarily mistakenly. He was right to reject a risky great leap forward in military technology—critics tend to understate the degree to which the services are already incorporating cutting-edge hardware—nor could he simply defend the status quo. So Cohen called for modest trims in manpower, totaling 60,000 personnel from all four services, coupled with an array of procurement cuts that preserved but reduced all of the services' pet projects. The big savings in his plan are supposed to come from better management practices and two new rounds of base closings.

The arguments Cohen used to justify some of his QDR show that the mind that brought us the nuclear build down is still a clever one—and still marked by an impulse to define the clever policy as the one that rests between two choices. Take fighter jets. To improve further the area of American defense that least needs improvement, the military is planning three very expensive new combat aircraft, the Navy's F-18A E/F, the Air Force's F-22 and the multi-service Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). I asked Cohen, who, as a senator, mocked the Air Force for its endless capacity to come up with new rationales for the B-2 bomber, why he had opted to keep these duplicative programs going, albeit at reduced levels. He conceded the still-unstarted JSF would have been relatively easy to cancel, and that the F-18A E/F, an update of an existing plane,

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was not justified on its own. But, he said, "There was a strategical and tactical motivation behind that decision." Cohen has decided to buy 548 F-18s (down from a Navy request of 1,000) as "leverage" to hold down the future costs of the JSF. Now, he says, if the JSF gets too expensive, the Pentagon can always buy more F-18s. Perhaps, through all the congressional and bureaucratic machinations in the years ahead, this strategem will unfold as Cohen plans. But the Secretary of Defense could have simply ordered half as many F-18s, which would have achieved the same purpose, and would have saved more money—but annoyed the Navy.

Cohen says his goal in the QDR was a "responsible," "realistic" plan, not a bold one that Congress would reject out of hand. But the QDR he eventually produced managed to be the most cautious possible version of the middle course, without being the most credible. Savings from better management of the Pentagon are notoriously easy to overstate. And it may have been even more quixotic to ask the Congress to fund his plan indirectly through politically painful base closings than it would have been to ask them for a bigger budget. This is especially true, says Michael O'Hanlon, who studied the QDR for the Brookings Institution, because Cohen himself "made no hard decisions that will make him unpopular within the Pentagon."

And, anyway, in Cohen's mind, the QDR isn't really a finished product. "It's going to be ... constantly in the process of evolving," he told me. "There'll be another QDR in another two and a half years. There will be additions to this proposal from the National Defense Panel ... so I think we'll see quite a few recommendations that the Hill will be impressed with." And maybe someday the country will have a clear sense of its government's defense priorities.

When I spoke with Cohen, the one time he let down his guard and spoke with passion was when I mentioned Tom Lambert, a man whom he says has had a more "profound impact" on his life than anyone except his father. Cohen's first job after law school was as an assistant to Lambert, a professor of law at Boston University who edited the American Trial Lawyers Association newsletter. Even now, the mere mention of his old mentor's name seems to transform the circumspect Secretary of Defense into the legal novice of three decades ago. "Do you know who he is?" Cohen gaped—then launched into Lambert's résumé from memory. "One of the most eloquent men to have walked the face of the earth. Former oratorical champion, West Coast debating champion, former prosecutor at the war crimes trials in Nuremberg. He was the dean of Stetson Law School at the age of 27. Taught at B.U. Law School, subject of torts, standing room only for all of his tenure. He has a photographic memory that can recite for two hours cases by page and paragraph number—and one of the most decent human beings on earth."

Like Cohen's mother, Lambert was an individual of uncompromising integrity and independence. Each month, big-name trial lawyers clamored to get their cases reported in Lambert's newsletter. But, according to Cohen, Lambert always chose cases strictly on their merits: "He would never bend to pressure, even from legal giants, no matter what they tried to do," he recalls. Once, Lambert took Cohen to a conference of state attorneys general at a country club in Delaware. Lambert chose this elite setting to deliver a ringing attack on racism in both the North and the South. The Arkansas delegation walked out, but Lambert spoke on for an hour, until his standing ovation. "I couldn't have been more proud of him that night," Cohen recalls.

But Lambert's morality was only part of the appeal; he also embodied the cool, above it all, intellectualism that Cohen sought to achieve himself. Frequently, master and adept would repair after work to Lambert's apartment overlooking the Charles River. As jazz played on the hi-fi and sailboats floated in the distance, they would sip martinis and discuss the great works of philosophy and poetry. Sometimes Lambert's wife chose an article for them from *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic Monthly*. "We would discuss the things more excellent, whatever they were," Lambert, now 82, wistfully recalls.

In their long chats, Lambert helped Cohen form the framework in which to regard the questions—and ambiguities—that life poses. "I said he should seek simplicity and distrust it," Lambert told me. "The lawyer has to be the cool-headed one who has the total view of an issue. He has to be the master of the telescope and the microscope." As a specialist in tort law, Lambert instructed Cohen in the fifty states' often mutually inconsistent doctrines on medical malpractice or product liability. "The common law is not frozen, in some Plantagenet mode," Lambert would say, "but, like the lawyer himself, forever becoming."

Today, the childless Lambert calls Cohen his "ideal son." Cohen speaks of Lambert as a "spiritual leader," a second father. Before that difficult vote on Nixon in 1974, it was Lambert that Cohen called to help him weigh the issues. When Cohen speaks about ravens of doubt, or "the soft vices of mindless consumption," it is Lambert's voice he is struggling to emulate. When he bores into the details of arms control or the QDR, he is trying to master both the telescope and the microscope.

Yet, as I listened to Cohen reminiscence so admiringly about his mentor, I couldn't help thinking that even Lambert at his most eloquent needed less courage than is routinely required of a good executive decision-maker in government, especially in the life-or-death area of national defense. Tom Lambert was an academic. If disgruntled trial lawyers succeeded in stripping him of his newsletter, he would still have tenure. He could use powerful words in part because there was no expectation they would be backed by powerful deeds. During two and a half decades of easy re-elections to that talking-shop called the U.S. Congress, it made a certain sense for Bill Cohen to try to be like Tom Lambert. He doesn't really have that option now. •

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THE HARD QUESTIONS

Outside agitation

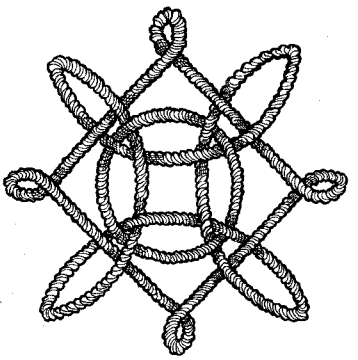
Some years ago, Irving Howe, then editor of the socialist magazine *Dissent*, explained how he came to play that role: "When intellectuals can do nothing else, they start a magazine." The same logic applies in Washington today: when presidents can do nothing else, they appoint a commission.

I'm sure a commission on America's racial problems is a good idea. But the commission that President Clinton has just appointed is unlikely to propose costless solutions to the problems it addresses: there are no costless solutions. And the president is unlikely to pay the costs of any solutions that are proposed. He has very few resources at his disposal, political or financial; and, on matters of race, any expenditure of political capital or public funds involves risks that he has shown little willingness to accept. So the commission's work is more likely to substitute for than to initiate a serious effort to deal with race in America.

Even so, the commission will serve an important function (just as I think magazines do). It will sponsor a more coherent debate than any that is currently going on; it will assemble and publicize a wealth of information at a time when most participants in racial politics relish their intellectual poverty; and it will force politicians at least to talk about racial problems and proposals to solve them. Indeed, even if talk is the only outcome, it is a consequential one; some of the ideas that are discussed may one day, given a different balance of political forces, be turned into government policies.

The president's public relations people have boasted that he is undertaking this initiative at a time when he is under no pressure to do so. He has seized the moment when calm deliberation is possible. There are no rioters in the streets, no burning buildings, no mass movements or political parties mobilizing men and women to march or strike. It may be to Clinton's credit that he is acting now, but it hardly reflects well on American society that so few others are acting. In American history, quietness has not been a democratic virtue. I am not calling for riot and arson; I have the same fear of violence as most Americans. But I'm not persuaded that the best time to talk about a problem is when no one is organizing around it. Is it really true that the civil rights agitation of the 1960s made deliberation about our common racial problems harder?

There are still good reasons for agitation, even after the advances of the last thirty-five years. Political activism and the government programs it inspired have produced a more substantial black middle class than America has ever known, and this is a success story that needs to be told. At the same time, however, the sharp decline of black admissions to universities where affirmative action has been abandoned suggests that this new class isn't yet reproducing itself by itself—or, at least, it isn't yet advancing its children as other middle classes have been able to do. Nor does this fledgling class yet have the social and economic resources to sustain strong communal organizations, or to organize mutual aid on as large a scale as is needed.



Consider the problems that blacks confront today: high overall unemployment (over 10 percent for blacks, under 5 percent for whites), frighteningly high unemployment among young men (approaching 50 percent in some cities), a prison population that includes too many of the missing workers (Andrew Hacker reports that "black women workers outnumber black men workers by about 780,000, which comes close to the figure for black men currently in prison"), a ratio of black to white income that hovers around 65 percent, a life expectancy for inner-city blacks that approximates Third World levels. And, in the face of all this, there is a pervasive sense of helplessness.

The solidarity and organizational energy of the '60s—which developed within older, religiously dominated, mostly Southern communities—has not survived, even among the people it benefited. There are no protest movements that command any significant political attention, no organizations pushing plausible programs. The most remarkable fact about the Million Man March of 1995 was that its organizers had no political agenda.

Is there a plausible agenda? Two things seem necessary, and both are likely to figure in the presidential commission's discussions. The first is suggested by William Julius Wilson in his book *When Work Disappears*, a persuasive and depressing account of the effects of unemployment on the black population of our inner cities. Wilson calls for the establishment of Works Progress Administration-style programs—public work for the workless. He stresses that the government need not always be the direct employer (it was in the WPA); it can subsidize employment in the private economy, which is what it does in many areas of social or military interest—from Medicaid to the defense industries. And, though Wilson has less to say about this, it can work through nonprofit organizations that sponsor, and partially pay for, good works: helping homebound invalids, reading to the blind, providing day care and cleaning up neighborhoods. Public work programs, according to Wilson, would help teach the discipline of everyday employment to inner-city youth. They would also pump money into the local economy, and if this money were passed through local organizations, it would serve a double function—not only helping individuals but also building a black civil society.

That is the second thing that needs to be done. In his usual resentful and hate-driven style, Louis Farrakhan has described the need for such civil institutions. Interviewed recently by the *Jerusalem Report*, he addressed himself to American Jews: "In practically every city in which there's a Jewish population, there's a Jewish hospital. There's not a black hospital. How have you been able ... to capture part of the market in clothing, food, shelter? Black people are weak in those areas. This puts us in a position to [be] exploited...." Farrakhan might have added Catholic, Lutheran and Episcopalian hospitals to his very short list. But otherwise he is right. And the "market" that these hospitals "capture" is mostly a market in government money, to which black hospitals would also have access. The establishment of such hospitals, indeed of a black welfare society like the welfare societies run now by (largely white) religious communities, would be a significant gain for the nation as a whole. And it's not hard to imagine success here, with only modest expansions of current welfare budgets.

I predict that Clinton's commission will canvass and defend programs of these two kinds. And nothing will happen, at least not soon, because no one else is canvassing or defending them. So we will learn that the success of commissions depends on the previous success of movements and parties. Deliberation sometimes requires agitation.

MICHAEL WALZER

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Human Rites

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, who died last year, was and is the best-known Cuban filmmaker, before or since Castro. Among Alea's films that were shown here, two were especially impressive: *Strawberry and Chocolate*, a gentle, empathic treatment of homosexuality, and *Memories of Underdevelopment*, about a bourgeois sybarite encountering the new Cuba.

Both pictures were to some degree surprising, in view of their provenance. A friendly account of a gay man was unexpected under Cuban rule; only a few years earlier Nestor Almendros had made a documentary indicting Cuba's persecution of homosexuals. And *Memories*, which I saw again recently—it's the film that won Alea an international reputation—clearly reveals Antonioni's influence in tempo and introspection; and Antonioni is not exactly an exemplar of Marxist vigor. Adding to the surprise of these films is the fact that Alea was no political dissident; he was an early and devoted supporter of Castro.

Continuing the paradox, here is Alea's latest and last film, which chuckles at the revolutionary state—something like the Ilf-Petrov *Twelve Chairs*, a Soviet novel that Alea transposed to Cuba and filmed early in his career. **Guantanamera** (Cinepix) means *The Woman of Guantanamo*, but it refers to the city, not the U.S. naval base. It was written by Alea and Juan Carlos Tabio, with Eliseo Alberto Diego; Alea and Tabio, who had collaborated previously, directed. Here we have an amiable comedy-romance that centers on a corpse—the troubles in transporting a coffin across Cuba to the right cemetery. (And here, too, there's an Alea precedent, a satirical comedy called *Death of a Bureaucrat* about burial errors.)

Adolfo (played by Carlo Cruz) is a fortyish pompous bureaucrat in Guantanamo. He is married to a retired professor of economics, Georgina (played by Mirtha Ibarra, Alea's wife). Georgina's elderly aunt, a famous singer known as Guantanamera, comes home to visit and dies in the embrace of her childhood sweetheart, Candido (played by Raúl Eguren). The aunt's coffin must cross Cuba to her cemetery of choice, and the puffy Adolfo is in charge of the meager two-car cortège. Of course mishaps occur, most of them through the tangles of communist bureaucracy.

One non-political tangle is Georgina's accidental meeting with a former student of hers, Mariano (Jorge Perugorria, familiar from *Strawberry and Chocolate*). Mariano, now a truck driver, had something more than a crush on his teacher, and she has treasured a note he wrote her when he left school. Mariano knows plenty of attractive women along his trucking route—apparently he moves from bed to bed as he delivers the goods—but the fresh sight of Georgina makes him look at love and life differently.

All through the cortège's trip, officialdom hinders progress. But counterpointed with these troubles are the colors of Cuban personality—from silliness to triumphant warmth—colors that, Alea seems to say, persist in Cuba under any regime. The finish of the film is guessable, but by then the people and the plots have become so comfy that we want the added comfort of a predictable ending.

Ibarra is an actress of resource, charm and mature sex appeal. Perugorria is so attractive that we don't bother to wonder about the future of this young man and this markedly older woman. And there's a modestly wise performance by Eguren as the dead woman's sweetheart who waited all his life for her to come back, only to have her die in his arms, and who now accompanies her coffin because, as he figures it, fidelity is fidelity.

What keeps *Guantanamera* entertaining, what makes it more than a series of gags, good or otherwise, is the Alea-Tabio feeling for the people. In the manner of some French comedies of the 1930s, this film finds an engaging way of bragging about its country, warts and all.

Julia Roberts has plentiful features; there's so *much* of her face, all of it declarative and pleasant. This is her chief asset, and this unfortunately becomes too apparent in **My Best Friend's Wedding** (TriStar). A farce-comedy, it must thrive, if it's to do so, on sparkle. But the bubbles are sparse, partly because of Roberts's low fizz level.

The picture has other troubles, too. The screenplay, by Ronald Bass (co-author of *Rain Man*), wants to be a 1990s version of a 1940s romp with Rosalind Russell, Cary Grant and Ralph Bellamy. The trouble, as with many farces and

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Designated Mourner. *Wallace Shawn's exquisite threnody for a disappearing civilization. As in the theater for which it was written, three people face us and talk—arrestingly. Mike Nichols, the central figure, is extraordinary. (Reviewed 3/24/97)* **La Promesse.** *Belgian. Subtly tremendous. A working-class teenager gets his first view of ethical depths through the behavior of an African woman amidst the foreign workers. (5/26/97)* **Ulee's Gold.** *Peter Fonda is grizzled and secure as a north Florida beekeeper trying to protect his family. Once again Victor Nunez, the cinema bard of that area, sings a generally quiet ode. (7/7/97)* **Waco: The Rules of Engagement.** *A 165-minute documentary about the fate of the Branch Davidians. Sobering. Shocking. Haunting. (7/14 & 21/97)*—**SK**

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comedies, is that, though Bass began with a usable premise, he apparently had no ending in mind. We get the feeling that, about nine-tenths of the way along, after he had all the characters knotted up, Bass suddenly thought, "Good heavens! I've got to find some way to finish off this thing." The way that he found is lame and makes a hash of what precedes it. (The same was true of Roberts's first hit, *Pretty Woman*.)

In New York, Roberts and her one-time lover, Dermot Mulroney, now her best friend, had long ago made an agreement to marry at 28 if neither received a better offer. At 28 Mulroney proposes—to someone in Chicago. Roberts tells her next-best friend, a gay man played by Rupert Everett, that she's going to Chicago to get him back. Jumbles and tumbles follow. (Some of the latter are literal. Presumably to make Roberts "human," the film gives her some pratfalls.)

But this situation, as with all triangle situations in comedy, has intrinsic snares. If the man is worth her while, how could he have been persuaded to change his marital mind? If his new intended is a ninny, why is he interested in her? And if she isn't a ninny, if she's worthy of the man that Roberts thought Mulroney was, what does it make of Roberts to try to break it up?

Fifty years ago they handled this sort of jam better because those comedies were made in a different social atmosphere. The audience rooted for the star, no matter what, and the idea of getting married was, for a woman, the terrestrial equivalent of salvation. Any stratagem to get our darling married to our other darling was not only permitted but desired. Not now. Too many questions and considerations intervene. And Roberts, star-faced though she is, can't fully enlist us in her cause.

Mulroney isn't even star-faced. Rupert Everett is amusingly crisp in an Anglicized version of what can now be called the Nathan Lane role—the gay friend who is always droll and always dependable. •

The Saint

By Nicholas Lemann

Locked in the Cabinet by Robert B. Reich

(Knopf, 338 pp., $25)

In most countries, Cabinet ministers are either prominent members of the national legislature or the cream of the career civil service. In America, we have neither a parliamentary system nor a tradition of lifelong government employment by the elite (the closest thing is the Foreign Service, which is a step up the class ladder from the civil service, but only one Foreign Service officer has ever become Secretary of State). So the members of our Cabinet, especially those who run the lesser departments, play a peculiarly small part in our system of government.

The Cabinet rarely meets, and when it does, it is usually to give the president a chance to demonstrate his commitment to a cause that doesn't really matter to him, or to create the appearance of debate over something that has already been decided. The press pays no attention to the Cabinet, partly because the presidency is its master narrative and partly because it assumes, correctly, that the Cabinet is powerless. Whatever influence the Cabinet once may have had was substantially taken away in the 1970s and 1980s by the advent of the congressional budget committees, the Office of Management and Budget, and the big Reagan budget deficit, which have concentrated executive-branch policymaking in the White House by subsuming most decisions under deficit-cutting exercises.

On average, Cabinet officers serve for only two years. Surrounded by tiny cadres of political appointees, who were often forced upon them by the White House, they sit atop tens of thousands of career civil servants who are their nominal subordinates. The idea that a short-term Cabinet member who has no control over personnel or policy and minimal familiarity with the bureaucracy can manage a department in the way that Jack Welch manages General Electric—which is what Cabinet members typically claim they're doing—is absurd.

Who are these people? Some Cabinet secretaries are former members of Congress who are looking for a face-saving or career-capping job with a fancy title;

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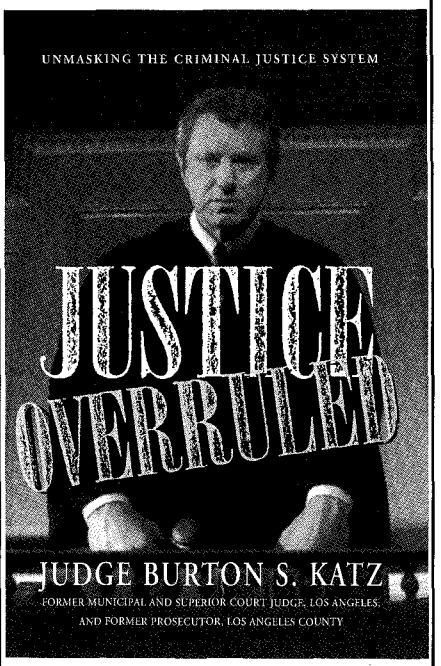
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and, like all former members of Congress, they are hired to lobby. Most of them, however, are members of the American mandarin class—lifelong compulsive overachievers who have made a more handsome living in investment banking or law or consulting than is available to government employees and now want to add Secretary of Something to their glittering résumés.

Members of the Cabinet often succumb to self-pity. The job, though uninfluential, is exhausting, and for a lot less recompense than these people are used to. Every evening someone hands you an index card containing the next day's schedule, which typically begins with a breakfast, ends with a dinner, and is divided into fifteen-minute or thirty-minute pro-forma meetings all the way in between. At home, the family glowers. The slumbering press wakes up only when it senses a scandal, and then you're in the dock for months. It quickly becomes clear that all executive-branch power resides in the White House, and so the pipsqueak aides who earned an office in the West Wing by grinding out rapid-response faxes during the campaign outrank you.

From a literary point of view, all this makes an American Cabinet memoir difficult to bring off. The best ones of the past, such as Harold Ickes's *Secret Diary* or, in England, R.H.S. Crossman's *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister* (both published a year after their authors' deaths in 1953 and 1975 respectively), have been yeasty inside accounts of high-level intrigue. But someone who has been only a figurehead can't very well write such a book. Robert B. Reich, the former Secretary of Labor, has cannily realized that he'd be better off not trying to pretend that he was more important than he really was. Instead he proposes to turn his political weakness into his literary strength: he plays off of his inconsequentiality, and it works. He is unusual in his willingness to reveal what is the most closely guarded secret of many high-level Washington figures, which is that they don't really matter much.

ROBERT REICH BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Somehow Reich's book got out of the gate with everyone believing that it is a real journal, and that it is self-effacing. It is neither, by a long shot. Although it is presented in the form of dated entries, each one reads much more like a short dramatic sketch than something written in a diary in real time. The entries are written in a determinedly simple, almost singsong English designed to guarantee that nobody misses the point. In form, they follow the rules of vaudeville-style blackout comedy, which are as strict as the rules of haiku: set up the situation, complicate it, resolve the complication with a punchline, bring down the curtain. As in vaudeville, there is a top banana, Reich, who is the focus, the star, the hero of every episode; and everybody else (including the star's wife and children and the president of the United States) is a second banana whose sole dramatic purpose is to feed the lovable Reich lines or to otherwise enhance his stardom. Quite often the episodes have Reich losing in some way, but it is understood that it is always a heroic, stature-enhancing loss. Reich plays a modest person in his book, which is hardly the same thing as his really being modest.

December 1, 1992: Reich is called in by a nameless pair of background-checkers. They ask him questions; and our hero, of course, has no skeletons in his closet. Then—the twist—they hand him a large black binder of "at least five hundred pages, single-spaced," containing "all the negative things critics have written about your books over the years." Since Reich is facing powerful anonymous interrogators, he is automatically the underdog in the situation, but that shouldn't obscure the real message of the situation, which is that he is unbelievably prolific and prominent. "And to think I accomplished all that in only fifteen years!" he humbly observes. And then the punchline: "My host leans toward me. 'You did much better than that.' He points to the label on the side of the black binder: Critics of Reich, Volume I." Ba-da-boom.

August 1, 1995: The Reich family, having fulfilled its two-year commitment to life in Washington, has returned to Cambridge. Reich, who is moving into an apartment, returns to their house to get a few things, but finds that he doesn't have a key. He decides to squeeze in through the dog door: "It's too small for a normal-sized person, but I figured it would be a cinch for me." That's the setup. The twist is that he gets stuck halfway through. While hopelessly trapped in the dog door ("maybe I'll just die here") he contemplates life alone in Washington. Although on the surface he is being humiliated, the true effect of the situation is to make him look as good as possible: he can now discuss his separation from his family in a setting that maximizes the feeling of how hard and painful it must be for him. At the end of the episode he wriggles free, not just of the dog door but of the imputed accusation that he has put career first and family second. We have learned that, as always, he has self-abnegated: "I'm desperately lonely for them. But I'm obsessed by the job."

Writing in *Slate*, Jonathan Rauch has demonstrated that Reich's tendency to dramatize is so pronounced that he has

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presented quotations that he made up as real. To Rauch's list of embellishments, I can add a few more examples. On pages 143 and 144, Reich quotes from a series of Reuters bulletins about his incurring the wrath of Wall Street fat cats, using language that hits the reality note hard: "At exactly 9 a.m. Eastern Standard Time ... the following bulletin goes out on the Reuters International news wire"; yet all three bulletins quoted seem to have been written by Reich, not Reuters. On page 228, Reich quotes Oklahoma Representative Ernest Istook berating him at a hearing; the exchange has been substantially edited, compressed and reworded, but it is presented as if it's a verbatim replay of the actual event. On page 294, Reich describes a "Nightline" appearance, and again, although it appears in the book in the form of a transcript, his lines and Ted Koppel's have been greatly improved in the retelling.

Reich responded to Rauch not by denying that he changed details of events, but by writing up a telephone conversation between Rauch and himself as another blackout sketch, with Rauch as a cartoon reporter-asshole and Reich in character as the innocent, good-humored victim. In this episode, too, the dialogue has a too-perfect-to-be-literal quality. ("I don't know about *you*, but where I come from there are such things as journalistic *ethics*," he has Rauch saying.) The same goes for many passages in Reich's book that are uncheckable; they are also unbelievable. Could a black teenager in Brooklyn really have said to Reich, "I'm tryin' to do the right thing. But if I doan get a job I be sellin' drugs this summer"? Did the head of Bridgestone, the Japanese tire company, really tell Reich that "*Japanese* worker do not strike. Only *American* worker strike. So we get new worker"? Did they really serve caviar and lobster tails in the big contributors' box at the Democratic National Convention in 1996? Was everyone at a dinner party at Lane Kirkland's house really "appalled," and did Mrs. Kirkland really shout "no!" in "abject horror," when Reich attempted to put mint jelly on the *pâté de foie gras*? And could this interplay between Reich and his younger son possibly have taken place as written?

> Tonight, as I tuck Sam in, he stares up at me and asks, "You're really going to help people, aren't you, Dad?"
> "I hope so, Sam."
> "You're going to help people get good jobs. That's what Mommy says."
> "I'll try."

We are not in the realm of historical record-keeping here, we are in the realm of myth-making. The Reich character in *Locked in the Cabinet* is a naïf, a "country bumpkin," a dedicated teacher, writer and crusader for social justice. Above all, he is an idealist. He comes from a humble background, and he remains a friend to ordinary people. He is not ambitious in the conventional Washington sense; he only wants to do good. His wife runs an advocacy program for victims of domestic violence. He is, as he constantly reminds us, very short. (That alone established him as the underdog.) He is immune to the blandishments of power.

The real-life Reich is perhaps a bit more attuned to the main chance. This is a man who appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* at the age of 20 ("The Demonstrators: Who? Why? How Many?"); who made $347,000 in lecture fees in 1992; who bought a $780,000 house when he came to Washington; and whose wife is a well-known law professor. Yet the character "Robert Reich" is presented by its creator with true feeling. It seems that, rather than consciously striking a pose, Reich is presenting to us the newsreel of his life exactly as it plays on his own mental screen.

There are passages so false in their modesty that they are nearly impossible to read with a straight face, but they seem to have been written with one. ("I've already spent eight years of my adult life in Washington. Much of it was grueling, thankless work—briefing and arguing cases before the Supreme Court, protecting unwary consumers from fraud.") Reich's drive to congratulate himself is so strong, his insistence upon his own heroism so constant, that they function as the price of admission to the book: if you can't find a way to accept them, you can't profit from his portrayal of Cabinet life, which is otherwise quite valuable. Every time Reich describes himself speaking in public, you can safely bet that he'll report that he received "a loud roar of approval that breaks into wild applause," or that "the room explodes," or that "the place erupts"—unless he is speaking up for the little people before an audience of rich businessmen, in which case he is glorified by their stony silence.

All of the book's celebrated self-deprecating anecdotes, such as the ones in which security guards fail to recognize Reich, are transparently lionizing. They demonstrate how adorably unpretentious he is; and anyway it's really the guard rather than Reich who's being made fun of, since the audience and Reich are both in on the joke. (He's the Secretary of Labor, you idiot!) About

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the closest Reich comes to genuine self-criticism is to say, near the end, "maybe I've been too much of an idealist." (Oh, stop torturing yourself.)

Although the hero of *Locked in the Cabinet* is a kind and gentle man, the author of *Locked in the Cabinet* can be quite nasty, especially by way of serving up villainous foils for the hero to play against. Richard Darman and Lynn Martin, members of the Cabinet that preceded him, are vain, cynical cutouts. Lloyd Bentsen is Margaret Dumont in pinstripes, a swell whose dramatic purpose is to draw himself up in haughty horror for the reaction shot whenever Reich makes a populist suggestion. Congressman Dan Hamburg (*"Taco? Sausage? Frankfurter?"*) "has no distinguishing characteristics apart from the bolos that he substitutes for neckties." Congressman Istook is "a bombastic fool" who "looks like a high-school debater nerd, with his black-rimmed glasses and bread-dough face." The "beefy, aging" Kirkland comes in for particular abuse, his every appearance accompanied by a catalog of physical characteristics that Reich finds repulsive.

The overall story that Reich tells is his disappointment with Clinton. Reich and Clinton have been friends since their Rhodes Scholar days, and it's obvious that the dream of Clinton as president and Reich as chief policy adviser has been around for many years. Reich opens the book professing bewilderment over everyone's assumption that he is going to serve in the Clinton administration—"the chances are so slim it's hardly worth talking about"—but this is belied by his decision to begin his journal just when it becomes clear that Clinton is going to be the Democratic presidential candidate.

At the outset it looks (to Reich, at least) as if Clinton has adopted as his blueprint for governance the views that Reich put forward in 1991 in his book *The Work of Nations*. Income inequality is rising; American business is moving low-skilled jobs to low-wage countries; the solution is for the government to invest massively in education and training, which by upgrading the skills of American workers will increase their incomes. In the summer of 1992, Reich reports, his investment strategy is "the centerpiece of [Clinton's] plan." Clinton wins the election by running on economics, he makes Reich the economic policy czar of the transition, and then he gives him his first-choice job.

The early signs couldn't be more propitious. But then Clinton tacks right, making deficit reduction rather than investment the main theme of his first year in office. His one big programmatic play is health care reform, not Reich's "lifetime learning" program. The most Reichian initiative of the first year, the economic stimulus package, is dropped. Rather than being the chief architect of the Clinton presidency, as plainly he had expected to be, Reich becomes a peripheral figure.

It isn't difficult to imagine what Clinton's side of the story would be. Its merits aside, Reich's investment idea would have offered Clinton a way to do what he always wants to do, which is to elide conflict. It permitted him to harp upon the recession and income inequality without having to call for economic redistribution, which would have put him right in the Republicans' sights; and, rather than have to take sides between business and labor, he could propose something that was plausibly in the interest of both. Once the campaign was over, though, the calculus would have changed. The Reich strategy was expensive. Where would the money come from? From tax increases and defense cuts, Reich would say—but that would generate conflict, not avoid it. Reich, who should have known better, joined the legion of people who have been certain that the president sees the world exactly as they do, and then found that at the crucial moment he wasn't there.

The situation worked itself out to Clinton's advantage, as his seductions-and-abandonments often have. Reich was an excellent Secretary of Labor. Known as a neoliberal during his career as an intellectual, he morphed into an old-fashioned champion of those at the bottom of the income ladder, and thus he served effectively as the administration's ambassador to the left. In *The Work of Nations*, Reich divided the country into three groups—symbolic analysts, routine production workers and in-person servers—and proposed, with less than complete optimism, upgrading the skills of the latter two groups to give them at least a small hint of the economic luster of the former one. In *Locked in the Cabinet*, the three groups go unmentioned, and the overall feeling is of an America made up of the good old categories of rich capitalists (who come across as less deserving of their good fortune than the symbolic analysts) and hard-pressed workers. As Labor Secretary, Reich seems to view the poor less as needlessly underskilled and more as a reserve army created by Wall Street to keep inflation down.

More practically, through his disdain for Kirkland, Reich helped to promote the rise to the presidency of the AFL-CIO of John Sweeney, who invested $35 million in the Democratic presidential and congressional campaigns in 1996. His flair for publicity and drama lifted the morale of the department, and helped to get issues such as sweatshops, downsizing and corporate welfare—the discussion of which is good for the Democrats and bad for the Republicans—onto the public agenda.

Outsider though he imagines himself to be, Reich nonetheless wound up in the grip of a standard Washington preoccupation with his lack of access and influence at the White House. Even after his wife and children have moved back to Cambridge, he muses that he'd like to stay on: "As much as I adore my family, I don't think I can turn my back on another four years of being secretary of labor. Perhaps I flatter myself, but I think I'm needed in Washington. No one else around B [his private name for Clinton] is telling him what I'm telling him, or pushing the underdog's agenda." Then the ascendancy of Dick Morris and Clinton's signing of the welfare bill convince Reich that he ought to be with his family after all. There are always good reasons to leave an administration—children, money, time—but Reich is typical in being more closely attuned to them the less he is part of the action. He begins the book by making fun of Darman for his overriding concern with being "in the loop," but it's precisely that concern that leads Reich to quit.

What distinguishes Reich from other Cabinet secretaries is not that he has a different value system, but that he is willing to violate the ordinary post-job code of behavior. Obviously he is not trying to maintain his eligibility to be asked back. His portrait of Clinton is personally fond but substantively negative. If everything in *Locked in the Cabinet* is a real journal entry, then it was as early as September 28, 1992, that Reich realized that the great danger for Clinton was that "he'll become unfocused and too eager to please." Six months into the administration, Reich's "subconscious" feelings about Clinton lead him to name his family's new dog Waffle. The president is a "supersalesman" who has a "syrupy voice," but no equipment more granitic than that.

Since Reich's literary mission is to pat himself on the back for having lost the Washington power wars, he has no need to impress us with his importance in the conventional sense. This enables him to describe the life of a Cabinet secretary at a level of candor that most of them stay well below, for the sake of preserving their dignity. Even for those who fail to be charmed by Reich's persona, *Locked in the Cabinet* will be worthwhile. Even as it alters facts about the author, it tells the

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truth about the government.

On taking office, Reich realizes, as Cabinet secretaries must often realize but usually won't admit, that he doesn't have a clue as to what goes on in the Labor Department. "I don't know enough to know whether someone else knows enough," he writes. So he has to hire a staff that does know. Once he has found such a staff (Reich hired good people), he becomes their prisoner. They set his schedule, and he is able to get through it only because they tell him before each meeting what to say. He lives in an impenetrable "bubble" created by the staff: "if I see and hear only what 'someone like me' should see and hear, no original or out-of-the-ordinary thought will ever permeate the bubble." A large portion of his busy days consists of mind-numbingly ritualized events at which an android Secretary of Labor could perform just as effectively as (if not more effectively than) a real person. "You have to want it bad to put up with this," he writes after a day on the road, campaigning for Democratic candidates.

The reason that so much of the job is devoted to boilerplate activity is that Cabinet secretaries are stock figures in an interplay of political interests. As Reich observes, they almost never make decisions. Instead, "they spend most of their time managing problems, making temporary fixes, mediating among warring factions, nudging subordinates and colleagues in directions that seem sensible." Even in private, they speak to each other not in the ruthless Mafia-don language that is usually put into the mouths of Washington power people by journalists and screenwriters, but in bland, cautious euphemisms. One of Reich's best bits of shtick involves counterposing what the participants in a meeting must have been really thinking against what they actually said (or what Reich claims they actually said). "I promise you I'll look into it," Bentsen tells him. Then Reich adds: "Translated: *I've had enough of this conversation. Go back to the sandbox and don't bother me again, kid.*"

During one meeting, a bored Reich writes out a funny list of what the Cabinet secretaries might more accurately be titled. He would be Secretary of Blue-Collar America, the Secretary of the Treasury would be Secretary of Wall Street, the Secretary of Commerce would be Secretary of Corporate America, the Secretary of the Interior would be Secretary of the West, the Secretary of Energy would be Secretary of Mountains and Deserts, and so on. All these people spend most of their time being pressured by a pre-existing set of lobbyists, committee chairmen and departmental employees, and they almost inevitably "go native" and begin to take the positions that any holder of their job would take—which helps to explain the difference between Reich the intellectual and Reich the Cabinet member. Conversely, the independent idea that has no constituency behind it tends to go nowhere. "There's no National Association of the Working Poor," Reich sourly notes after losing one of his budget battles.

No wonder the president is such a thrilling figure to a member of the Cabinet. He represents the only real possibility of engaging in non-generic activity. On the rare occasions when Reich can speak directly to Clinton for more than a few seconds, the intensity of his hope, the adrenaline-fueled precision of his calculation about how hard to push, is palpable. If Clinton is unresponsive (in one episode he barely looks up from his paperwork while Reich is pitching), we feel Reich's pain.

But Reich is also very good at evoking the feeling that Clinton himself is caught up in a web of forces beyond his control. His budget officers, old-hand deficit hawks, present him with options, and he usually splits the difference between them; and not caring about deficit reduction isn't one of the options. The seigneurial Alan Greenspan, with spies and

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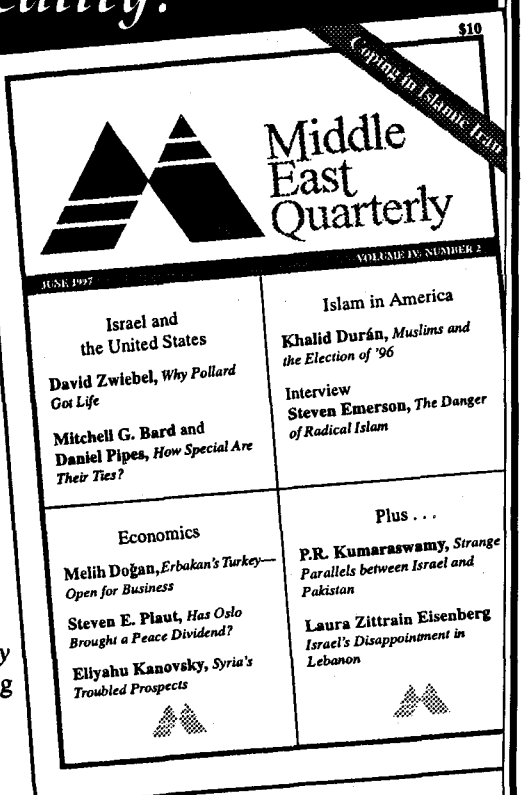
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allies planted all over Washington and Wall Street, fears Clinton's displeasure far less than Clinton fears his. Clinton is fabulously good at getting people who come in angry to go away happy. Does that count as an accomplishment? Even the smallest of bold actions is perilous for him, because of the possibility that everyone will just ignore whatever he has done and his mystique will vanish. During the baseball strike of 1995, Clinton calls in Bud Selig and makes a deal, which the other owners refuse to accept. There is nothing Clinton can do about it. "A president can lose authority simply by exerting it without effect," Reich notes mercilessly.

Since *Locked in the Cabinet* doesn't go out of its way on behalf of anyone but Reich himself, the idea that Reich could be trying to protect his old friend may be unrealistic. Still, there are three possible conclusions that can be drawn about Clinton from Reich's story. First, that he doesn't believe in anything. Second, that he is a liberal like Reich, but too accommodating to get things done. And third, that he is both liberal and forceful, but has failed to put across a program for the same reason that Reich failed: the presidency is just a king-size version of the sorry lot of the Cabinet minister. Reich creates the impression that the first and least flattering of these possibilities is not the correct one. In this way, at least, he may have done his former boss a favor.

NICHOLAS LEMANN is national correspondent of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

An Unsentimental Education

BY STANISLAW BARANCZAK

A Book of Memories by Péter Nádas translated from the Hungarian by Ivan Sanders with Imre Goldstein

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 706 pp., $30)

Who needs another 700-page-long Central European novel? It is a fair question. But this particular 700-page-long Central European novel is very likely the book that you have been awaiting since you read *Remembrance of Things Past*, *The Magic Mountain* or *The Man Without Qualities*. I am serious. If you allow yourself to be put off by this book, by its length or its seriousness of purpose or its origin in one of those exasperatingly small and troublesome countries stuck somewhere in the middle of Europe, you may be denying yourself one of the most rewarding reading experiences of your lifetime. If a masterpiece is a book that makes us wonder how we could have claimed to understand our own existence before we read it, then Péter Nádas's book is unquestionably a masterpiece.

The unmistakable sense of discovery with which this book is going to leave every American reader who lays his or her hands on it, except for the really hopeless admirers of Tom Clancy's prose, rings a joyful and (as is the case with all genuine discoveries) a sad note. We rejoice at having discovered a great book and a great writer; we are saddened by our realization that we owe our joy in part to our ignorance. How was it possible that most of us never heard of this book's and this writer's existence? Where are all the *Reader's Encyclopedias* and Internets when you need them? And how many comparable achievements of world literature get overlooked each year and are doomed to obscurity for the simple reason that they are written in Estonian or Farsi rather than English or French?

Nádas's magnum opus appears in English after a considerable delay, eleven years after its original publication; but here is at least one masterpiece that has not been overlooked. More, it is now available in a translation that can only be called exemplary. Even a reader who knows no Hungarian can appreciate the degree of difficulty that faced Ivan Sanders and Imre Goldstein as they tried to preserve Nádas's precision of language and complexity of thought. Consider just one of hundreds of possible examples, a single long sentence that describes the protagonist's father, a Stalinist prosecutor, as he comes home from his office alarmed by the news that his ailing wife is being visited by the former friend of the family (and probably the wife's ex-lover), who has just been released from jail, where he did time as a political offender, apparently as a result of the prosecutor's secret denunciation:

> What I had learnt about Father while rummaging through his papers seemed trivial compared to what was now becoming visible on his face; perhaps once again it was something I should not have seen: his body shrank somehow, his figure—I always thought of him as tall and slender—sagged under the weight of his coat; his comportment, the strength of his proud bearing, seemed to be illusory now; all these changes produced a curved back and stooped shoulders, and he had difficulty holding his head up, it was wobbling, hovering helplessly above his coat, because not only what he would have wanted to say but couldn't made his lips tremble, the trembling radiating to his nostrils, eyelids and eyebrows, knitting his forehead in deep furrows, but another force was stiffening his head in a twisted position, and what his mouth wanted to say was stuck in his windpipe, in his shoulders; always an impeccable dresser, Father now looked disheveled, his tie twisted to the side, the tips of his shirt collar standing straight up, his coat and the jacket under it both unbuttoned, part of his shirt slipping out of his pants over his belly, so many signs of frantic, undignified haste, embarrassment and agitation, but of course he couldn't have been aware of them; I still don't know how he got the news—to all indications Janos's arrival at our place was completely unexpected—but I imagine that the moment Father heard the news he jumped into his car, he must have been both overjoyed and devastated, his soul, if there is such a thing, silently split in two, while at the command of his instincts he tried to maintain the impression that he was still a whole person; two irreconcilable emotions must have been raging in him with equal force, that's what made his face twitch, his head float and wobble.

It's all in the wrist: the vivid and mercilessly objective concreteness in the description of the physical signs of the character's distress, along with the subtle psychological insight, along with the ambiguity of the adolescent narrator's emotions (he loves and loathes his father, acknowledges and refuses to acknowledge the reasons for his odd looks and behavior) would not be so convincing had all these factors not been put in motion by the syntax; and the translators do a superb job rendering all these things in their English version. Nothing less than mastery was needed to translate this masterful novel.

So, this is not an easy book. If only for this reason, it is understandable that the English-speaking world has for so long known virtually nothing about Nádas,

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even though the works of his contemporaries such as George Konrad or Peter Esterhazy in translation have elicited some interest in present-day Hungarian literature. Yet our ignorance stands in stark contrast with the renown that Nádas has enjoyed in his own country at least since the publication in 1977 of *The End of the Family Story*, the first of his two novels. (It will soon be issued in English, too.) Before *A Book of Memories*, Nádas also published several plays and three collections of short stories. By the late 1970s, it was clear that he was one of the most important writers in Hungary.

By then, he was already at work on a new and extremely demanding book. It took him ten years to complete the novel that we may now read, and it is not hard to see why. Some of the reasons are obvious: the tightly woven and multilayered plot, the epic sweep, the complexity of the main characters' self-analyses, the richness of style. Even if we violate the book's artistic complexity by choosing to squeeze its plot into a few sentences, the task that Nádas set for himself sounds formidable. *A Book of Memories* revolves around the story of the life of a young Hungarian writer, who serves as the novel's chief protagonist as well as the chief among its three narrators. (Since he remains nameless throughout the story, let us call him the Narrator with a capital N.) Before we learn from another source that his life ended abruptly at 33, we are given, through the Narrator's flashbacks and reminiscences, glimpses of his immediate and earlier past. They portray his existence as a relentless search for the truth about himself. The nature of this search is artistic (he is writing a novel whose hero is his spiritual stand-in and whose chapters are incorporated into his narrative) and, above all, erotic; his bisexual experiences of love fulfilled or unfulfilled provide him with the mirror in which he contemplates the meaning of his own existence.

But the very fact that he is a mid-twentieth-century Hungarian taints his soul-searching with an indelible sense of being at the mercy of history as well as love. He was born around 1940 into a Budapest bourgeois family. After the war, his father joined the Communists to become a state prosecutor and a star in Stalinist political trials. The family, though not spared its own share of tragedies and conflicts, lives a life of privilege in a special area reserved for the political elite, near the heavily guarded private residence of President Rakosi himself. The Narrator's coming of age is a complex process of discovering the truth about his once-adored father's political fanaticism (which reaches its culminating point in 1956, when the apparently insane father attempts to bring into existence an underground terrorist group of neo-Stalinists and, failing to achieve this, commits suicide) while at the same time coping with the violent stirrings of his adolescent sexuality. The main point of difficulty is that these two kinds of formative experiences are subtly intertwined: love seems to be always to some extent spurred or inhibited or influenced by political circumstances (as in the Narrator's teenage romance with a daughter of another Communist dignitary, a childish yet quite dangerous affair that takes off with their joint rummaging through the drawers of their fathers' desks in search of materials that might compromise their dads as "spies"), and the political dimension of events seems to be driven by erotic attraction or repulsion (as in the superb chapter describing a street demonstration in Budapest in the fall of 1956 from the viewpoint of a schoolboy who is more focused on scanning crowds in search of his attractive friend than trying to understand what all the commotion is about).

To tell this sort of story with enough force to make it convincing and enough delicacy to prevent it from slipping into the crudely "political" and "erotic" would have been a daunting task for any writer. Yet Nádas doesn't confine himself to that task alone. It may have taken him so long to write this book because *A Book of Memories* could have only been written after a thorough reassessment of the possibilities of the genre for a writer at the end of the twentieth century. Nádas's novel is innovative in a willful way: by returning to the genre's tradition. Or, rather, to many of its traditions at once. Nádas's art certainly places him in the company of Proust, Mann and Musil; but his roots reach even deeper, to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the conventions and devices that helped the novel to establish its identity.

I have in mind, in particular, two old tricks: the device of the "found manuscript" and the device of the "novel within the novel." Both are well known and instantly recognizable; what nonetheless makes their presence in this novel invigorating and original is, first, the unexpectedness of each device's introduction and, second, the ironic clash between the aura of traditionality that such conventions are usually steeped in and the conspicuously contemporary, late-twentieth-century setting of Nádas's book. It is only near the end of the book, for example, that we realize, all of

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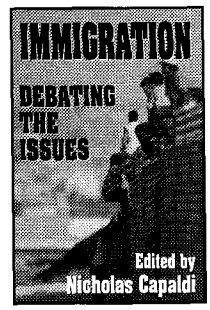

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a sudden, that what we have been reading so far is, in fact, that hoary thing, a "found manuscript." What the Narrator seemed to be presenting in the book's first 600 pages was not what it appeared to be—not a straightforward autobiographical confession, but an element in a more elaborate literary game. His reminiscences were not conveyed by him directly to us; they were coming to us through the intermediary of his old friend Krisztian, a person in whose family's unofficial custody the protagonist had remained for the last three years of his life, when he was recovering in a Hungarian provincial town from a nervous breakdown suffered as a result of the disastrous ending of his love affair in East Germany. It is Krisztian who, after his friend's unexpected death, found his unfinished manuscripts and, presumably, saw to their publication.

This setup is filled with ironies, since the manuscript-finder's own narrative, which is the book's penultimate chapter, shows him as a person who has been molded by the pressures of time and place (the years of Rakosi's rule in Hungary before the revolution in 1956) in a way that makes him the opposite of the protagonist in every essential respect. As an ironic result of their different backgrounds (in contrast to the Narrator's Stalinist father, Krisztian was the son of a "class enemy," a Hungarian officer killed in the Second World War while fighting the Soviets), Krisztian is as much attracted by the ideals of respectability and order as his counterpart is prone to doubt and rebelliousness. In his youth, Krisztian attempted to enter a military academy, and eventually he became an economist working for the government as a foreign-trade specialist, while his friend pursued a literary career. (There is a highly telling episode in Krisztian's reminiscences, where he and the Narrator meet for the first time after many years in a box in the Moscow opera, of all places, during the gala performance of some Soviet propaganda ballet. The Narrator, surrounded by his artistic friends, cannot suppress a fit of hysterical laughter, while Krisztian, though equally aware of the pompous absurdity of the production, prefers to leave the box and to distance himself from the scandal.)

In short, Krisztian plays Fortinbras to the protagonist's dead Hamlet. As a consequence, the old device of the found manuscript acquires a new significance: we are forced to wonder what Fortinbras would have done if he had found the manuscript of a memoir in Elsinore among Hamlet's personal effects. Wouldn't he edit it a little? But Krisztian may not have done that—it would be hard to imagine that anything could have been censored or toned down in his friend's narratives, since these texts are, politically and sexually, as frank and outspoken as you can get. Still, at one point Krisztian admits his responsibility for the arrangement of the linear order of the seventeen preceding chapters (and for placing another chapter in the end, following his own narrative, as if to allow his deceased friend to have the last word). And this single mention has considerable consequences for the way we read this novel, or look back at the part that we have read up to this point. The sequence of the book's chapters turns out to be open to question. If this novel in its entirety represents a quest for the truth, then Krisztian's intrusion reminds us that even the truth of an individual life may be only approximated, and that this approximation may emerge only from the welter of conflicting testimonies.

The issue of the novel's composition is by no means a negligible one. The baffling order of its first seventeen chapters is not a mere disturbance of chronology that can easily be set right. For another traditional device of complication comes into effect here: the "novel within the novel." The narrative moves back and forth between two planes: the reminiscences of the Narrator, a 30-year-old Hungarian writer, temporarily residing in East Berlin (the action takes place in the early 1970s), and fragments of the novel written by him and left behind with those reminiscences. In his novel, he focuses on his literary alter ego, a German writer, his coeval in chronological terms but a man of a much earlier epoch, a man of the fin-de-siècle. The story of this nineteenth-century character corresponds with the story of the narrator-protagonist himself, though it does so loosely, with a penchant for a late Romantic intensification of the erotic and the morbid.

The whole novel has, then, three narrators (if we count Krisztian, who narrates only a single chapter but is a much more central and three-dimensional character than the conventional figure of a fictitious editor of a found manuscript); but their mutual relationships are not of the same sort. The fictitious German writer is clearly an emanation of the personality of his maker, that is, the Narrator, while the point of difference between these two comes down to their placement in two contrasting historical epochs. Krisztian, on the other hand, is the protagonist's contemporary, but their personalities could hardly be more different. Accordingly, the novel's general structure also consists of three basic subplots, whose arrangement could be visualized as a safe (the narrative of the twentieth-century protagonist) containing a smaller safe (his novel in progress) and supplied with a key (Krisztian's single-chapter narrative). But of course this is too simple. For we cannot be sure whether the key really fits the larger safe's lock, that is, whether Krisztian's comments suffice to answer all the questions raised by the Narrator's story. Ultimately, it is up to the reader to find a key of his or her own. There is a labyrinthine quality to the way in which this book engages our mental faculties, and this quality manifests itself not only in the major existential questions with which we are confronted but also in the minor mysteries of plot and narration that we have to solve almost every step of the way. The reader is forced to make connections between specific pieces of information scattered over the pages of different chapters; the meaning of a

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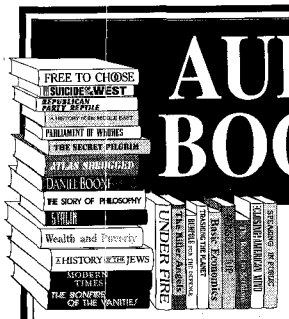

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scene or event presented on a page may remain puzzling for a long time, until it finds its complement or its explanation fifty or 200 pages later.

One of the crucial scenes in the novel, for instance, is the first eye-to-eye encounter between the protagonist and Krisztian. They are both schoolboys, and their meeting takes place in Chapter Three:

> When he was no more than an arm's length from me and we both stopped, he said, "There's something I'd like to ask of you," calling me by my name, his tone cool and matter-of-fact, "and I'd appreciate it greatly if you could do it for me.... I must ask you not to report me to the principal, or if you already have, go and try to take it back...."
>
> "I have no intention of denouncing you," I told him quietly, but he wouldn't even move his head, "and even if I wanted to, you could always deny it and say you were thinking of your dog; it would take some explaining, but you could have been thinking of your dog."

What is the subject of this exchange? What transgression of Krisztian's is not to be "reported"? What was it that he said or did that may be rendered harmless by declaring that he "was thinking of his dog"? We are given no clue. In fact, we learn about the consequences of that fateful conversation—it provides the protagonist with the first opportunity to let Krisztian know about his infatuation with him—before we learn what its causes were. It is only several chapters later that we finally discover what prompted the conversation, what it was all about. It turns out that, after the public announcement of Stalin's illness early in 1953, the Narrator overheard accidentally Krisztian's remark to a group of friends: "So finally this sonofabitch is gonna croak, too!"

This delayed delivery of important information (as well as other disturbances of chronology) cannot be explained away solely by pointing at Krisztian and his role as a mistaken or careless editor of the found manuscript. We have to assume that the novel's construction has been planned this way by Nádas himself—who wishes us to see through chronology, who encourages us to make our own connections between the facts. It is up to the reader to solve this gigantic puzzle, to rearrange its pieces into a meaningful whole.

What makes this whole meaningful is, first and foremost, the paradoxicality of love. The Narrator is portrayed as a man who attempts to use love and sex as instruments of cognition and self-cognition, while at the same time deluding himself that his knowledge of himself will allow him to re-enter the world of natural human relationships from which he has always felt banished. Such hope proves to be illusory—self-cognition is an affair of self-consciousness, and self-consciousness precludes a return to spontaneous, non-reflective existence—but in order to reach that conclusion we must travel with the narrator though the *selva oscura* of his ceaseless, compulsive reflection on the nature of his deficiencies. And yet this finely nuanced, self-centered, introspective reflection makes us increasingly aware of the extent to which the protagonist's personality has been molded by the external pressures of Central European history. This is the novel that Proust might have written if he had been born seventy years later and several hundred miles to the east.

It is also a novel which, thanks to its knack for tracing the invisible links between the individual truths of the characters' lives and the supra-individual factuality of history, appears to be as scrupulously realistic a portrayal of a particular society at a particular turn of history as *War and Peace*, or *A Sentimental Education*. The story of the Narrator's life may be puzzling, but it is fully credible in its inner logic and its relations with the outer world. By means of his reminiscences, we observe the process of his arriving—early in his childhood and as a result of the combined impact of various experiences, from the first stirrings of his sexuality to the political atmosphere of his times—at the realization of his irredeemable misery. In a moment of illumination, he discovers the futility of his "pain of trying to be like other people":

> [These were] completely futile attempts, since I could never resemble anyone strongly enough to be just like them and there was always a difference, and ultimately I always found myself alone; no one, myself included, ever wanted this difference or whatever it was; and though I may have hated myself for it, with every effort to identify with someone and at the same time lure him into my orbit I only called attention to this difference, to my illness, to the very thing I wanted to annihilate....

Significantly, this passage is part of the scene in which the protagonist's desperate search for human contact, his "effort to identify with someone," takes on a shape which might be mistaken for sadistic. As a child, he was left alone to play with his younger sister, who was born brain-damaged, and he conducted an experiment: he pricked her with pins, as if testing the range of possibilities that

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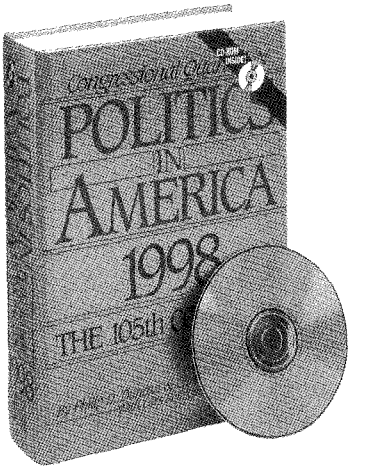

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physical pain may have as a substitute for communication. In a broader sense, pain remains throughout his life the only language of which he is more or less confident. And this is true also of love.

Since both love and suffering speak to the senses by the intermediary of the human body, the protagonist becomes "an anarchist of the body, believing that there is no God besides the body" and taking at face value, as it were, the metaphor from John 2:21 ("But he spoke of the temple of his body....") which serves as the novel's motto. At the same time, even though his own reminiscences contain some of the most graphic descriptions of physical love (heterosexual and homosexual) that one can find in serious literature, it is perfectly clear that none of these scenes has been produced for a titillating effect. Too much pain lurks beneath the surface of ecstasy here. The protagonist's bisexual promiscuity is too transparent a screen for his increasingly desperate attempts to find the world of others responsive to his hopeless "effort to identify with someone." Each of these sex scenes is a scene in a tragedy.

Nádas's greatness as a writer lies not only in his truly Proustian inwardness. His even greater achievement is that he has succeeded in creating a believable connection between the individual and the social, between the biological and the historical. In this respect, his "novel within the novel" gains another sort of significance: it is the vehicle by which the protagonist may escape from himself, from the unchangeable concreteness of his own ethnically, socially and historically determined identity. By moving the time of the action back seventy or so years, and making his hero an imaginary German aristocrat, he tries to leave the confines of his own self, at least in his art. In his life, similar attempts—above all, his desire to make permanent his bisexual liaison with two East German artists, the young poet Melchior and the older actress Thea—have proven futile; and if we assume that his unfinished novel was being written—along with his personal reminiscences, also unfinished—in the final three years of his life, then the act of writing, we must conclude, was his response to the profound crisis that had almost ended his quest for human communication altogether.

The underlying cause of that crisis was not only the impossibility of making love permanent. It was also the obstacle of history and geography. The Narrator's parting with Melchior would be a tragic experience by and in itself; but it becomes a tragedy of disastrous proportions because the two lovers are separated by the Berlin Wall (which in the 1970s still seemed destined to exist forever), as Melchior defects to the West and the Narrator is deported back to Hungary. Nádas's bewilderingly rich, complex, powerful book cannot possibly be reduced to a single unequivocal message, but it certainly teaches this: the ultimate futility of any attempt at detaching one's own existence from the experience shared with others. Fate cannot be freed from History.

STANISLAW BARANCZAK is working, with Clare Cavanagh, on a translation of *Complete Poems, 1957-1997*, by Wislawa Szymborska, to be published by Harcourt Brace & Co.

The Rough Rider

BY SEAN WILENTZ

American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America by Robert Hughes

(Knopf, 635 pp., $65)

Tough, erudite Robert Hughes has created a media sensation out of an unlikely subject, the history of art in America. But sensations pass, and so it is good that he has also done more than that. In its televised and published versions, *American Visions* is a triumph of popular criticism. It is well-informed about its chosen subjects and about their historical background. It is ambitiously conceived, smartly written and gorgeously produced. It shrewdly blends a rather conventional survey of American art history with massive appropriations from the latest scholarship. And, of course, it features Hughes himself, who, among his many achievements, has come to play an interesting role in American cultural controversy: the art critic as rough rider.

The ruggedness of Hughes's person is also the ruggedness of his mind. In his thinking and speaking about art, he defies the stereotype of the critic of exaggerated sensibility, the tender Anglophilic connoisseur. On screen, dressed in open-necked, outdoorsy gear—feet apart, knuckles facing forward—Hughes looks like a man who would prefer a pub crawl to a Christie's auction. His hearty Australian accent has enough of the British Empire in it to connote cultural authority to an American audience, but it is also plainly the accent of an insolent colonial. Virility seems to be a part of his critical method. He strides through galleries and museums as if they were the great outdoors. He is an odd mixture of subtlety and restlessness.

Hughes's broad standpoint is that of an old-fashioned, working-man democrat. It is an endangered social type in his adopted land. Hughes gives no quarter to "political correctness" and the narrowly political interpretation of art, but he is sympathetic to the hard-working classes and contemptuous of the ignorant, idle rich. In his new book, as in his splendid polemic *Culture of Complaint* (1993), Hughes has no use for today's fetishes of race and sex. "Identity does not mean individuality," he observes neatly. "It is a means of framing public conformity and ... a foolish worship of origins." But neither is he taken in by the smarmy, go-go art world fostered by the speculative mania (and the bad painting) of the Reagan years; and he does not ignore the depredations of "the inflamed identity of the Christian right." He is sort of a cross between Kenneth Clark and Mike Royko. His prose, like his gait, never minces.

Hughes has a thick skin and he expects a thick skin in others. When he smells bullshit, as he says he does in the work of Barnett Newman, he calls it "bullshit" (in the book, not on television). Various women of the arts, famous and obscure, get the back of his hand, including the patroness Mabel Dodge Luhan ("the Miss Piggy of the early American avant-garde," and "an intolerable bitch"), Edward Hopper's "sexually parsimonious" wife Jo ("an untamed shrew"), and the "wanna-be witches" and "matched blond lesbians in Jeep Cherokees" who, according to Hughes, help make modern-day Taos, New Mexico, a dreary New Age mecca.

Hughes is not suckered by every self-declared American hero or prophet. He casts a baleful eye on counterfeit cow-

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boys, such as the Yale man Frederic Remington (who, Hughes notes, was so fat at the age of 40 that he could barely ride a horse) for turning morbid, turn-of-the-century racial fears into visual metaphors of Wild West machismo. Barnett Newman's fraudulence, Hughes charges, lay in his vatic vaporizing about how his paintings meant "the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism." Instead Hughes admires artists whom he perceives as authentically and aesthetically brave and down-to-earth—artists who, like the explorer John James Audubon, have been "enraptured by the drama of nature," or who, like the émigré Alfred Stieglitz, have believed that the arts should be "conduits of vitality" that "challenge and refresh its viewers' responses to the world."

The art critic as rough rider is not a new type in American culture, even if the roughest of the current riders is Australian. Half a century ago, the skeptical and vigorous tough-guy Clement Greenberg blended Marxism and formalism with a hard-boiled immigrant affect. Many of Greenberg's main heroes, the Abstract Expressionists, struck 100-proof poses, at the old Cedar Tavern or on Highway 495 in eastern Long Island. Hughes's swagger—it is a modulated swagger, which is not an easy thing—brings to mind also the ebullient Robert Henri, who inspired the Ashcan School painters and critics, including John Sloan and George Bellows, in the 1890s and early 1900s. Henri was an influential painter and teacher who promoted, by example, an ideal of the artist (as Hughes writes) as "a flaneur, but not a dandy," who "promenades the city not to be seen but to see": "the artist as hunter," Hughes observes, with a "virile eye, always staring at reality over the pencil." Hughes quotes John Sloan's recollection of Henri as "a catalyst, an enthusiast, a healthy-minded man. A born preacher ... [with] the pioneer's contempt for cant and aestheticism," and with a "robust love for life." Sloan's description might just as easily apply to Hughes himself.

There are differences, of course. Hughes's updating of the profane, no-nonsense American style—goaded, no doubt, by the hopelessly settled perspectives of the genteel left—runs the risk of sounding cranky and even misogynist. And, unlike Henri and Greenberg, Hughes appears to be a critic without a cause, in the sense that he is not the champion or the sponsor of a movement. He is, instead, an impolite traditionalist surrounded by the vulgarities of today's art world, in an America where the myth of the avant-garde has descended into self-parody and where visual modernism is, as he writes, "harassed by its own sense of defeated expectations."

Hughes is not exactly a voice crying in the wilderness. He is a voice crying from the cover of *Time* magazine, from PBS, from the superstore book outlets. This is not a bad thing. His success may signify a public fatigue with the culture wars, a weariness with the dogmatisms of the usual suspects. He may have tapped into a new longing for a less aggrieved direction, appreciative of scholarship, the arts and the other preoccupations of the demonized "cultural elite," but without the identity-politics sloganeering and the subsidized kitsch that passes itself off as "transgressive" or "progressive" or even (perversely) "regressive." Hughes's performance is not shockingly new. He is refurbishing an old American trope—the lusty, blunt, educated man of reason standing up to folly and frippery and repression—but the trope still has legs. This is encouraging news.

The subtitle to *American Visions* is carefully worded. Hughes has attempted to write not a history of American art, but a history of art in America. Instead of using history to illuminate works of art, Hughes wishes to evaluate American history by means of its painting, sculpture and architecture. This is the sort of heavily contextualized approach to the visual arts that has become increasingly attractive to art historians and museum curators. It is in keeping with the larger collective scholarly effort of the past forty years, in Britain and France as well as the United States, to re-evaluate the history of modern culture and politics from a broad social perspective, one that is impatient with nationalist pieties.

Social historians have often pillaged the art world for illustrative material, but too often they have done so in a tendentious or documentary fashion, as if art merely mirrors economic and social forces. And art historians and curators have often turned to history, but often in the service of a simplification, to connect art and artists to some vague ideological or sentimental construct such as the Age of Romanticism or the Roaring '20s. Hughes (like Simon Schama, who reverses Hughes's trajectory and comes to art from history, and also teaches for the BBC) is interested in a denser and more precise set of historical connections among artists, art and society, without succumbing to the materialist reductionisms that are common among social historians.

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the lives and the ideas and the social settings of individual artists; and it involves identifying the iconographical implications of specific works within a broad historical (as well as art-historical) frame of reference; and it involves reconstructing and then interpreting how contemporaries perceived or used a particular object. Hughes's underlying assumption, as he puts it, is that "[a]rt is rarely, in the end, untouched by the deep currents moving in the society around it." The trick is to elucidate how those social currents touch the art, without getting bogged down in sociology or formalism. What Hughes sets out to do is difficult to do well.

In order to make his unruly subject cohere, Hughes half-heartedly gestures toward a few grand themes. Above all, he discusses the myth of American newness: "a central myth not only of American art but of America itself," an ideal of "spiritual renovation" that dates back to the Puritans' covenant with God:

> At the end of the eighteenth century, this was transposed into political renewal by the world's first great democratic revolution. By the 1830s the sense of renewal and discovery had been re-projected on the expansion and internal colonization of America, producing, among a host of other results, its first significant and original landscape art. By 1900 the myth of newness, of perpetual progress, had been vastly fortified and confirmed by technology.

And so on, down to the hyper-institutionalized contemporary American avant-garde and its own myths of newness.

"Newness," of course, is old news. Writers from Crèvecoeur to Irving Howe have made similar arguments; and Hughes's prose in these passages is uncharacteristically tired. The concept of "newness" has some explanatory merits (especially in distinguishing American political thought from European), but it often pretends to explain far too much about our history and our culture, by lumping together everything from John Winthrop's remarks about the Puritan city on a hill to Ezra Pound's imprecation to "Make it new!" And so it often explains too little, especially with respect to the visual arts. What does "newness" have to do with the inexpressive portraiture of the Puritans, or with the work of the great nineteenth-century expatriates Whistler, Sargent and Cassatt?

Fortunately, Hughes is more interested in examining particular works of art and their historical significance than he is in sustaining grand claims. In *American Visions*, he stays close to the object. His preference for exacting historical analysis leads him to a vast array of facts, and inevitably there are errors. (Even metaphorically, the Brooklyn Bridge does not connect Manhattan with "the rest of America," as Hughes says in the television series. John Trumbull's famous painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence is printed here in reverse.) Still, these are not the sorts of mistakes that interfere with an idea.

Hughes's periodization of American history and American art is unsurprising. In keeping with current academic trends, he begins not with Jamestown or Plymouth Rock, but with the sixteenth-century Spanish settlements in what is now the southwestern United States. He does not take the more radical step of considering pre-Columbian art as "American"; and after he has finished looking at Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico, he has virtually nothing more to say about Native American art over the next 400 years. Instead, *American Visions* is arranged into history textbook blocs, based on a straightforward political chronology: the colonial period, followed by the age of the American Revolution, followed by the pre-Civil War years and so on, through the Great Depression and World War II, the postwar years to about 1965 and our own post-Vietnam era. The book's emphases on genres (painting, sculpture, architecture) and on their practitioners are also largely in keeping with earlier surveys of American art history. Hughes's contribution is to see unfamiliar things in, and to say unfamiliar things about, familiar artworks and artists—and to say them to a mass audience without dumbing anything down.

Hughes has commendably learned a great deal from the art scholars and social historians who share his interest in relating art to history. It is disconcerting, however, to read a book that relies so heavily on other books but contains no footnotes, no bibliography, no other tokens of gratitude. Consider, for example, Hughes's handling of Winslow Homer's beautiful and mysterious painting, completed in 1877, of a Virginia scene, *The Carnival*. According to the historian Peter H. Wood and the art historian Karen C.C. Dalton (in an exhibition-catalog essay, "Winslow Homer's Images of Blacks," that was published in 1988), there is much more historical meaning in Homer's "enigmatic masterpiece" than might at first meet the eye:

> In strong midday sunlight a pensive individual is donning a brightly colored costume with assistance from two women who concentrate upon their work.... [H]e stands at the center of the picture, body turned and feet set as if ready to move his weight forward or backward. Indeed the somber women—as stoic and deliberate as the Fates of classical mythology who used their threads to shape human destinies—appear to pull him in two directions.... [T]he man's hat clearly resembles a Phrygian liberty cap. It is red, white, and blue, as are his flaglike pants, making the wearer an embodiment of patriotism and freedom at one level. But at the same time his baggy outfit and oversized shoes present a clownlike aspect ... invoking the blend of light entertainment and poignant reflection associated with a European harlequin. In addition, he represents a slice of Anglo-Virginian culture that has since been lost, for the actual Christmas tradition which the Virginia blacks are sharing with the artist would appear to be the revelry and role reversal known as Jonkonnu.... Mounted during the Christmas holidays, it annually provided the one occasion, during slavery times, when blacks could pass through the picket fence separating the quarters from the big house ... singing mocking songs and demanding coins and gifts from the master.

Wood and Dalton then note that "during Reconstruction, however, it was the Fourth of July which became a particularly important symbolic occasion for black Americans":

> If true equality was to reign permanently—as it did each year for only a fleeting moment during the Jonkonnu ritual of slavery times—then one might expect that blacks could now participate fully in the oratory, prayers, and parades of Independence Day, from which they had been commonly excluded even in the North. But the issue remained unsettled, tied to the deepest political and social struggles of Reconstruction.

The Carnival, Wood and Dalton conclude, powerfully conveys this ambivalent status of blacks in the latter years of Reconstruction—"the barefoot children," they write, "clinging to small American flags, but now without any school books or Bibles, their future prospects very much in doubt."

Here is Hughes's account of Homer's "deeply nuanced and, in the end, tragic scene":

> A group of people is preparing for the African-American festival known in the South as Jonkonnu.... It entailed the costuming of a Harlequin-like figure or Lord of Misrule, and this Homer depicts: a man caparisoned in bright, tatterdemalion clothes, yellow, red, and blue, with a "liberty cap" on his head. Two women are sewing them on him. The one on the right extends her arm, pulling the long thread right through, in a gesture of compelling and somber gravity; she is a classical Fate, seen below the Mason-Dixon line. Next to her, but apart from her, gazing at the

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vesting ceremony with wonder, are some children, one of whom holds a Stars and Stripes (for by Reconstruction, the rituals of the Fourth of July had been overlaid on those of Jonkonnu). Homer makes us sense how far the hopes of emancipation still are from the realities of black life in the South.

One reads and one learns, Hughes like the rest of us. And no one could ever accuse Hughes of venturing an opinion in a voice other than his own. But, plainly, Hughes has looked at *The Carnival* through his own eyes and through Wood and Dalton's eyes. In a similar way Hughes reworks dozens of fascinating, historically informed interpretations. He discusses how John Singleton Copley's famous portrait of Paul Revere, seated at his silversmith's bench, amounted to an American democratic manifesto, proclaiming pride in work and plebeian political self-assurance—"the radical as craftsman"—and then he links that manifesto both to Revere's life and to the brewing revolutionary crisis in Boston in the 1770s; and this point also appears in two essays by Paul Staiti and Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. in the 1995 exhibition catalog on Copley, *John Singleton Copley in America*. Later, drawing heavily upon the writings of the art historian Marianne Doezema and others, he links George Bellows's boxing scenes to the class and racial politics of the Progressive era, placing *Stag at Sharkey's* in its precise seedy West Side location, and revealing how public excitement (and apprehension) over the victories of the black heavyweight Jack Johnson informed *Both Members of This Club*. The industry and the knowledge that have gone into Hughes's book are enormous. The spirit of Hughes's endeavor, certainly, is far grander than virtually all of the efforts of the scholars. But the rough rider should have found a way not to ride roughly over his debts.

How successfully, though, does *American Visions* deliver on Hughes's highest ambition, "to look at America through the lens of its art," to see what can be said about Americans "from the things and images they have made"? Within his chosen limits, very successfully indeed.

Hughes's America is not a wholesome, consensual, "exceptional" place, as it is imagined (in different ways) by superpatriots and Euro-snobs. It is a place that is chronically roiled by conflicts of region and race and ideology and class—material and moral conflicts that have led sometimes to terrible violence, sometimes to cant, sometimes to acts of transcendence and grace. Hughes's achievement is, in part, to explicate examples of the latter in America's artistic heritage without going soft. He knows how to praise what deserves to be praised without making extenuations for lapses in technique or intelligence. And this is not merely a tonal achievement. Hughes has a genuinely complicated brain.

Hughes does not simply explicate historical meanings. With his sharp eye, he also shows how, for better and for worse, artistic techniques have shaped those meanings. Take, for example, one of Hughes's many admiring passages, about Jean-Antoine Houdon's marble statue of the planter-revolutionary George Washington, in the Virginia State Capitol in Richmond:

> It is a superb display of neo-classical style and intelligence. Insofar as a single figure can, it expresses democracy. Jefferson had insisted that "the size should be precisely that of a man." Anything bigger would have been pretentious. It shows the statesman as citizen, *primus inter pares* in the Latin phrase that meant so much to the Founding Fathers—not a king, not a god, but first among equals. Divine presence, however, is implied by its placement in the State House; Houdon's Washington stands where the effigy of the god would have stood in a real Roman temple.... [He] leans on a bundle of rods, the Roman fasces—each rod a state, their union connoting strength. His sword is sheathed. His plough is the symbol of agrarian virtue, and implies the planting of a new political order. The final, almost subliminal touch is a missing button on the right lapel of Washington's coat, which lets you know that the great man is capable of a certain negligence in *tenue* and is not a stickler for protocol—democracy in dress, as it were.

Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

WINSLOW HOMER, *THE CARNIVAL*, 1877

Hughes might have added that the democrat was a slaveholder—but this is still a strong passage. Political ideas, and neoclassical political language, artistic concerns about placement and proportion, even odd little details: Hughes merges them effortlessly, while evoking a particular historical moment.

He does the same with work that he dislikes, including what he pointedly calls a picture by Norman Rockwell:

> A *picture*, not a painting. Practically none of his audience ever saw an original Rockwell. His work addressed its vast audience through reproduction alone. Its images had no surface. Its minute verisimilitude—as well as the exaggeration of every wink, scowl, grin, and pout on its characters' faces—had the depthless narrative clarity of TV. It offered Arcadia.... The great social fact was family continuity. It was a world unmarked by doubt, violence, or greed. The mountainous Thanksgiving turkey that appears in *Freedom from Want*, 1943, is a symbol of virtuous abundance rather than extravagance, a Puritan tone confirmed by the glasses of plain water on the table.

This is very good. It is also a little misleading: the original Puritans drank beer, not plain water, on their feast days. Rockwell's 1940s air of sober jollification actually owed more to the turn-of-the-century prohibitionist campaigns of Carrie Nation than it did to Cotton Mather. Still, Hughes's gloss on Rockwell's pictures nicely conveys their technical and spiritual flatness, standing midway between the social realism of the 1930s and the suburban blandness of the 1950s. Hughes is an excellent guide to what he sees. He has written a peculiarly reliable book, a temperamental work of reference.

And an incomplete one. The major shortcomings in *American Visions* have to do with what it doesn't cover. There is a great deal of important American visual material that Hughes omits from his intelligent purview. It would be churlish to criticize him simply for leaving things out: *American Visions* runs to eight hours on television and to more than 600 large pages; and it discusses, by my estimate, more than 200 painters, sculptors and architects. Even within these fairly generous limits, as Hughes warns, any effort to describe more than four centuries of American art "is bound to be extremely partial, selective, and incomplete."

Still, in view of Hughes's concerns with

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American history as well as American art, I have questions. Why does he highlight American sculpture, which remained highly derivative, for the most part, until the appearance of Saint-Gaudens in the 1880s, and whose subsequent history has been rather fitful? And, if he seeks the sculptural, why does he not take longer looks at the humbler, everyday forms that shaped and expressed American popular sensibilities—graveyard sculpture, or even cigar-store Indians? Hughes sees fit to examine vernacular stonecutting and woodcarving as visual arts when he treats the early colonial period. Why does he largely exclude them in later periods?

Similar questions might be raised about Hughes's handling of architecture and painting. He has relatively little to say about the balloon-frame building construction that transformed the nineteenth-century American landscape; and he has virtually nothing at all to say about the post-World War II suburban and sunbelt sprawl, as epitomized by modern Los Angeles. Apart from set pieces on the early southwest churches and a Puritan meeting house, and a brief segment, in the televised version, on Robert Schuller's Cathedral of Tomorrow, Hughes all but ignores American sacred architecture. There is no mention of Currier and Ives, or any of the other less celebrated but highly capable graphic artists whose work profoundly shaped how Americans saw themselves a century and a half ago—and that continue to shape how modern Americans see their history.

Hughes describes the Civil War as "America's Iliad, and its Holocaust as well," and as one of the controlling images of American culture after 1860. Given the relative paucity of antebellum Southern painting, however, Hughes's visual account of the emerging Cotton Kingdom is truncated. He says that "worthwhile paintings or drawings of the Civil War" are scarce—evidence of how the reality of the slaughter overwhelmed both the artists' and the public's imaginative

Symphonie Fantastique

In 1830, Hector Berlioz composed his first symphony
for Harriet Smithson, an Irish actress
whom he had seen but never met

I.

There was something in the way she became Ophelia.
her mouth dark, tongue flickering between her teeth,
that slip of pink reminding the bright faces before her
this madness could be shed.
She became the image of grief,
and Berlioz stirred in his seat,
the Odéon heady with cretonne and snuff,
back-lit by sweet gas from the floor lamps.
He was so close to the flame, he could make out
the places where sweat had slid through
the thick white powder on her neck,
so that the flush of her skin
rose like a promise from her dress's bone stays.

II.

Grief lends daring to my heart,
he repeated, holding his shirt to his face
for its traces of the theatre—
the pleasure of watching her hair slip
in shudders to the nape of her neck.
When he turned toward his table,
Berlioz swore he could smell the girl
as if she had leaned against his curtains,
singing, shutting the door on a breath of herself.

III.

It was not so much the girl
but the not having her
that let the composer hear
the whole thing at once—
the bell's brash gong,
one cymbal scouring the hollow of the other,
and the drum over the winds,
as a heart against breath,
the soul demands that the body give back.

IV.

The night she went to listen,
she had not known much of the man at all,
just that once, several years before,
she had received hot house lilies
after a play (she could not remember which)
only she'd had a fever and the smell of flowers
became metallic as sickness.
Before the music began,
her companion hissed something about
the whole *fantastic* being written for her,
her name in the program notes.
Knowing the feeling of a whole hall watching,
she sat straight until the music ended.
What could she do but rise?
The actress checked the reflection of her rapture
in the chair's brass rim, swallowed her father's
county cork accent,
and hoped the space would give her voice back
to the last row
as she shouted over the deep orchestra pit,
"Berlioz, je t'aime."

V.

Years later, he'd wake before dawn to write.
She would stir, her mouth gone slack with sleep.
He prayed she would not open her eyes
as he threw her stiff corsets,
the rough tulle of her petticoats
onto the rug, to make a blank space
where he could imagine the woman he had not known,
the way she would have looked through a window
at dusk,
waiting for him, his return uncertain,
the light from her room on the street,
the way it was among the stones,
the gaps between each etched block became
what he had imagined of loving.

ELIZA GRISWOLD

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capacities. Visually, it seems, the Civil War remains a brutal cipher. It would have seemed less so, however, had Hughes been even more attentive to Matthew Brady and his assistants, or had he deemed the often extraordinary journalistic sketches from the front (including Winslow Homer's) more "worthwhile," or had he included the work of cartoonists such as Thomas Nast, or had he spent even a little more time on funerary architecture. In fact, the Civil War left powerful visual impressions, but Hughes barely does them justice.

And then there is the greatest sin of all: the scanting of American photography, a fundamental form, if ever there was one, in connecting American art to American history. Hughes does mention what he nicely calls Stieglitz's "rebellion against the academic assumption that photography, although useful to the artist, was inferior to painting"—a rebellion that helped to establish photography around the world as a serious art form. Along with Stieglitz, Hughes includes intelligent capsule assessments of Matthew Brady, Jacob Riis and Cindy Sherman. But he entirely overlooks Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, two of the really significant American artists of the 1930s, a crucial decade. Berenice Abbott is also missing, as are Ansel Adams, James Van DerZee and Diane Arbus. Margaret Bourke-White merits one fleeting remark; and Robert Frank merits two fleeting remarks, both of them about his friendships with painters. Nor does Hughes consider the rich tradition of American photojournalism and its effects on the visual arts and on popular culture.

True, a Frenchman invented photography (just as a Belgian invented the saxophone). But it is arguable that America's photography has been this country's greatest single contribution to the visual arts. Photography is the jazz of the visual arts. In no other art form has American work loomed so large for so long. (In none of the other *still* visual arts, I should say; but it really is too much to expect Hughes to have treated the movies, too. He does make some useful references to films and television.) A number of explanations for the supremacy of American photography come to mind. There is the American obsession with technology and gadgetry. There is the peculiar empiricist aesthetic that has been as evident in American poetry (from Whitman to William Carlos Williams) as in the paintings of Thomas Eakins, Thomas Anshutz and their descendants. Whatever the answer, the question is important, and Hughes virtually ignores it.

Are the visual arts the best medium for understanding the American past? This is a question not about methodology, but about America. Surely there is at least as much to be learned from music (from popular music especially) as there is from pictures concerning the spread of American-style Victorian domesticity, or the razzmatazz of the 1920s, or the rise and fall of the civil rights movement. Dance tells us things about the history of American religion that are barely hinted at in American church architecture. Having started out wondering how much about America could be learned from its visual arts, Hughes seems unaware of just how often the answer turns out to be: not that much.

Have the peculiarities of region, religion and race in America encouraged other art forms at the expense of painting and sculpture? Did American democracy, as Tocqueville averred, restrain the development of some arts only to encourage the development of other arts? "In aristocracies a few great pictures are produced," he wrote, "[and] in democratic countries a vast number of insignificant ones." He was too kind to aristocracy, which produced many insignificant pictures, and too unkind to democracy, which produced more than a few great pictures. The history of American art has proved Tocqueville wrong. Still, he was right to wonder about how the American revolution in politics and philosophy affected the spirit and the substance of American art.

Hughes is deeply aware of these perplexities, but he is constrained by his form. Is television to blame? Reading Hughes's stimulating book, I sometimes wanted the BBC to get out of the man's way, so that his mind could get to the hard and tricky stuff, to the more tangled aspects of American culture. Hughes has a gift for telegenic pedagogy, but finally he is too good for television. •

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 7*

"supply-side" effect. It's the effect of opening up a tax loophole.

The main point: Moore doesn't even contest the thrust of my argument. In 1993 he insisted that Clinton's tax increase would "torpedo ... the U.S. economy." He wasn't alone. Daniel Mitchell has said "the Clinton tax increase will ... destroy jobs ... reduce economic growth, and increase the budget deficit." (I'm using ellipses because he also predicted other, less quantifiable, cataclysms.) They still seem to believe they were right. So I'll wager that we now have more jobs, faster economic growth and a lower deficit than we did in 1992.

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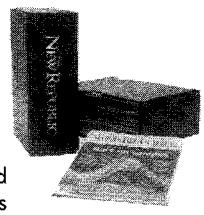

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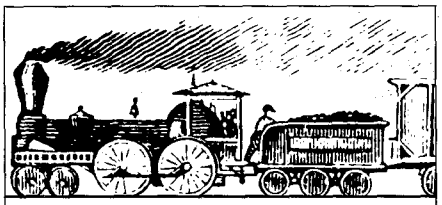

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NEW HAMPSHIRE DIARIST

Missing

THE LEARJET VANISHED ON CHRISTmas Eve, as it approached the New Hampshire runway in the sleet and fog. For an instant, as the TV anchor announced the news, I felt the familiar sense of titillation with which the TV voyeur welcomes another anonymous disaster. And then I heard the name, Johan Schwartz, and I recalled the only Jewish Swede I ever knew, the kid who ruled my neighborhood with his tie-dyed shirts and long blond hair, who, in the fourth grade, leaned over and kissed my sister as if he were 16, and who, as he predicted, would one day fly above our homes.

THEY SEARCHED FOR THIRTEEN days. A Blackhawk helicopter crisscrossed the sky with an infrared device that detected body heat. Dogs sniffed for plane fuel. Dowsers waved divining rods. When someone spotted a large break in a frozen reservoir, a team of divers plunged beneath the ice. "Please don't stop looking," Johan's father pleaded with state officials. But on January 6, the largest ground search in New Hampshire history ceased. And when I arrived in April, they were no longer hoping to find someone living.

WHEN JOHAN AND I WERE IN HIGH school, we used to try to hide—from our parents, our teachers, our coaches. My favorite book was *How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found.* It explained how to assume the identity of a dead friend, forge your birth certificate and dodge the feds. "To a man of a certain age," the author said, "there's a bit of magic in the very thought of cutting all ties. . . ." Once, I convinced Johan to skip classes and sneak out to Kikini Island, a deserted slip of land in Long Island Sound. We stole a six-pack of beer from my house and talked about the latest girls Johan had kissed (Carolyn, Lori and Courtney) and the latest girls I wanted to kiss (Carolyn, Lori and Courtney). He told me you had to have just the right hands to unclip a bra because those clips were tricky and you didn't want to get your fingers caught. Reluctantly, I showed him my hands and, to my pleasant surprise, he said they looked pretty good. After awhile, we fell asleep, dizzy from the beer. When we awoke, we found the tide lapping our ankles, and our parents were out looking for us.

AT 6:30 A.M., THE RADISSON HOTEL is already crowded with volunteers. There are neighbors I haven't seen in more than a decade. It feels like a reunion, until they divide us into search parties. In my group is my friend Jeff Manchester, who grew up down the street from Johan and me; a hiker from Vermont who says he might as well do what he loves for a good cause; a local who says he heard the plane "whoosh" over his head on Christmas Eve and can't get it out of his head; and the widow of the copilot, Patrick Hayes, married just six weeks before the Learjet disappeared. "You'll be expecting to find something big," our team leader explains. "But if they hit the side of a mountain at 250 miles an hour, then the plane will be in bits in a tiny radius."

UNTIL YOU'VE BEEN IN deep mountain woods, it is hard to imagine how a plane can just vanish. Once you're there, it's not. As we spread out sixty feet apart and begin sweeping the forest, I'm suddenly surrounded by trees that scratch my skin. We are supposed to stay in eye contact, but after a few minutes I can't see anyone. I call out Jeff's name, and hear him call out mine. And soon we tighten our line so that we are no more than twenty feet apart.

THESE ARE THE THINGS YOU NEED to search for a body in the White Mountains: crampons, hiking boots, backpack, trail mix, bottled water, compass, two-way radio, map, long johns, SPF 15 sunblock and rope. These are the things you can find: spruces, frogs, garden snakes, moose, bullet shells, a Nestle Crunch wrapper, coyote, flint rock, a dirty blue jacket, bear tracks and bears. Sometimes in the snow you see things that aren't there. As I hike, a mound of snow becomes a broken hull, a stream a windshield. Once I yell out, "Over there," only to get there and find moss and mud.

ONE DAY BEFORE I ARRIVED, A group of searchers saw a glimmer of metal on Moose Mountain. They rushed toward it, their feet sinking in the snow. They had seen things before but not like this: wings and a fuselage, as hard and mean as the cold. And then, all of a sudden, they just froze. A propeller, which didn't come from any jet, was jutting above the snow. They had found a Cherokee Piper, a single-engine prop plane that had crashed more than a decade ago.

EVERY RELIGION HAS ITS WAY OF closing on death: Catholics hold wakes, Hindus build pyres, Jews sit shiva. In each case, the ceremony centers around a body. But when there is no body, there can be no burial; there is only grief. Which is why the Schwartzes continue to scour the White Mountains, and why so many families are still searching for MIAs in Vietnam thirty years later. Even the word "missing" is defined not so much by the lost object as by those who long for it; indeed, there is no missing without a misser. Without the body, there is in a sense no death. There are always doubts: What really happened? And sometimes, in the middle of the night, the destructive delusion: What if they survived?

THERE IS A GRAVEYARD, though, for the missing: cyberspace, which is to say, nowhere at all. For days after the crash, conspiracy buffs discussed online how the government secretly removed the plane and Johan's body, just as it did the aliens in Roswell, New Mexico. Malignancy, it seems, is easier to deal with than mystery. The Schwartz and Hayes families send out their own cyber-search party. At http://www.serve.com/cb/learjet/, they list daily weather reports, aerial photos and a $10,000 reward. If you click on one icon, you are sent to the official Website for Learjet Inc.: the "legendary Learjet performance at a light-jet price." If you click another, you end up on a hazy black page, on which a white face slowly emerges. It is Johan, smiling.

THE STRANGE THING ABOUT JOhan is that he vanished from my life more than a decade ago. During that time, I picked up only fragments about him: how he was driving Teddy's Taxi, playing in a band called Merkin' Dream and, finally, after years of wandering from job to job, doing what he had always wanted—flying for a charter company. It was only when he officially vanished that I thought about him in any real sense, that the fragments became whole and that he truly reappeared.

NOW, THE SEARCHERS ONLY GO out sporadically, a family member or a gang of teenagers hoping to pocket the reward. The emergency hotline rarely rings; the dowsers, the psychics, even the conspiracists have gone home. Someday, though, high in the woods, a trapper or hunter or hiker will find my friend, and the search will be over.

DAVID GRANN

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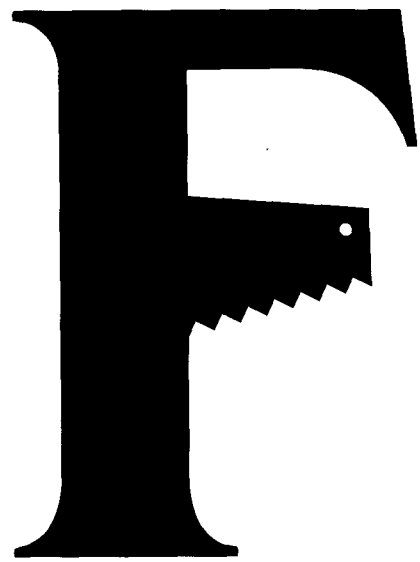

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